

Middle-Aged Businessman, Arise in Another World! Volume 1

Sai Sumimori

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MIDDLE-AGED BUSINESSMAN, ARISE IN ANOTHER WORLD!

Making a
Name for
Myself
Thanks to
Goddess
Power!

Author

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Illustration

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**GET
LOST!!**

A single
shout tore
the air
apart.

Shouzou Onigawara

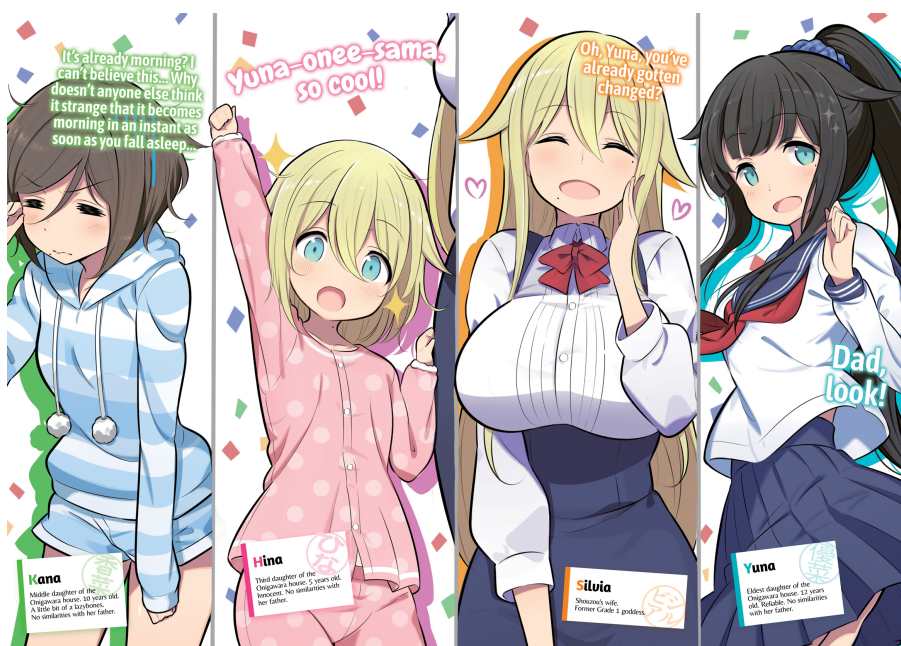
Father of the Onigawara family. A mere salaryman, but is able to scare off even magic beasts with a single shout.

Piee?!

The startled
voice was
from Emalia.

Emalia

Grade 7 goddess who came to investigate the reason for the Onigawara house's transmigration.





Shouzou's head shot up, and swiveled around to look at each of the four people in turn.

Please hire me for this place!
Due to certain reasons, I can only be in this city for about a year. That is why it will only be for a limited amount of time.
But this I promise you:
If you hire me, then within this one year—

I will make this Elunheine Adventurer's Guild the top guild in this entire city!

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Design / Yuko Mucadeya + Aoki Tetsuya (musicago graphics)

Chapter 1: The Man and the Goddess on a Rainy Night

Onigawara Shouzou was 28 when he met *her*. It was on a summer night when the rain was pouring down heavily.

Being employed at a black IT company, his days and nights were fully occupied with flying around client offices. That day, too, despite it having been his birthday, he was heading home completely exhausted.

The rain incessantly drummed on his umbrella without mercy. The boiling heat of the day, instead of alleviating, had gradually developed into an altogether thoroughly uncomfortable stuffy mugginess.

Shouzou loosened his tie, then quickened his pace.

It happened when he was almost back at his apartment; his eyes were drawn and transfixed by a woman in the middle of the road who had her face turned skyward and was allowing the rain to drench her. She was a young woman, seemingly in her early twenties.

—She looked almost like a goddess.

The woman was so stunningly beautiful that Shouzou doubted his eyes for a moment. Her silver hair was dripping with rain, and her thin, white one-piece dress clung tightly to her body. Her abundant breasts were showing through, and it was immediately obvious that she wasn't wearing any underwear.



“Umm..... is something the matter?” To think that he would be the one to initiate conversation. Shouzou was surprised at himself.

His age equaled the number of years he had been without a girlfriend. Aside from work-related instances, his experience with talking to girls was almost nil. Cursed with the triple combo of “huge body,” “fierce face,” and “rough voice,” he was feared by every single person he met. The women were no exception.

Oh, right. Suddenly being addressed on the street at night by a guy who looked like a wild beast would for sure cause her to cower in fear. In the first place, the other party appeared to be a foreigner. Whether she can communicate or not is already doubtful in and of itself. “Ah, never mind, I’m sorry for bothering you.....” Shouzou apologized in a fluster, then attempted to circle around to the other side of the narrow street.

“The rain, it drenched me.” A pleasant voice that sounded like the murmur of a brook caused Shouzou to freeze in his tracks.

“Hah?” A weird sound came out of Shouzou’s mouth.

The woman turned her blue eyes toward Shouzou, then continued speaking in an amiable tone.

“It was so very muggy, so I wanted to cool down. It’s my first time getting wet with rain, but it sure feels great, doesn’t it?”

“I guess.....?”

“Would you like to join me?”

Shouzou had never imagined that the very first invitation in his life from a woman would be, “Would you like to get wet in the rain together?”

“Um, but, you do know, right? That when you get wet with rain, your body temperature decreases, which weakens your resistance and leaves you susceptible to pathogens, which ultimately causes you to catch a cold?”

“It’ll be fine.”

“Um, but, you do know, right? Raindrops these days are quite acidic, and also pick up dust and other particles when falling from the sky, so the growing opinion is that it’s better to avoid getting it on your skin if possible.” Even he didn’t know what he was saying anymore at this point.

All he had was a single emotion, a single thought, that he was sure of.

“Here.” Shouzou proffered his umbrella.

A young woman was being drenched in the rain, all by her lonesome.

Surely she had a reason for doing so that no one else could, that no one should, guess.

The rain cannot wash away sorrow, nor can it make pain more bearable.

That's why, at the very least, he wanted her to know that "human compassion" is something that is much more common and much closer at hand than she might imagine.

"Life may be bitter and painful at times, but there are definitely great moments too." Saying it seemingly more for himself than for her to hear, Shouzou then pushed the umbrella toward her even further, paying no mind to the fact that he was getting soaked.

"You're a kind person."

After she accepted the umbrella, without replying to the compliment, Shouzou said "Take care" and then dashed off at full speed—

Second floor, wooden apartment. The external hallway was covered by a corrugated iron roof, but the fierce rain was having no trouble making its way in. By the time Shouzou reached the door of his own apartment, he was thoroughly soaked, down to his underwear. It felt extremely uncomfortable.

Shouzou slid his key into the lock, then turned it with a click. But then he froze.

(Did I waste a perfect opportunity.....?) The chance to hold a conversation with that great a beauty would probably never come to him again for the rest of his life. And besides that, perhaps it was a bad choice to leave a young woman by herself out in the street this late at night.

(Should I go back?) He was growing worried whether the woman, who was very likely grieving about something, was planning to hurt herself in her despair.

"Are you perhaps under a misconception of some sort?"

"*HyoWAH?!?*" Suddenly hearing a voice addressing him from behind surprised him so much that he almost actually jumped.

Turning around, he found the woman standing there, smiling.

"Err, umm....."

"I am having a lot of fun right now. I'm not feeling bitter or pained at all."

"Hah? Haa..... umm, did you follow me just to tell me that.....?"

"Mhmm," she said brightly, as if she didn't have a single worry in the world. "But I *am* in a bit of a bind, as I don't have anywhere to stay tonight. So if it's not too much trouble for you....."

Entranced by her upturned eyes, Shouzou could only manage a sigh-like response like "Haa....."

Seemingly having taken that as acquiescence, the woman pushed past Shouzou with a "Then pardon me" and entered his place.

(Is this all right.....?) His home was just a place to sleep, so it was

very tidy. To be more precise, there wasn't much of anything in the room in the first place, so there was no way for it to get cluttered.

Despite the old age of the apartment, the bathroom alone was brand new. He hoped it was acceptable enough for a young woman to use without feeling uncomfortable.

(No no no! I'm here, though! The presence of such a bulky man should itself be enough to make her feel uncomfortable!) Shouzou hurriedly chased after her.

"May I borrow your shower?"

"Eh? Sure, go ahead. Over there is the door to the bathroom..... wait, you seriously intend to stay here tonight?"

"Of course. You're also quite soaked, would you like to go in with me?"

"I think not!" Shouzou had never imagined that the second invitation in his life from a woman would be "Would you like to take a shower with me?"

Leaving him behind with an "Aw, I see," she headed into the bathroom with a disappointed expression.

A sound of splashing water different from that of the rain began reverberating throughout his apartment.

Shouzou took off his suit, then quickly wiped his hair and body off with a towel. He then changed into his home clothes, underwear and all.

"W-What should I do.....?" For the time being, he straightened up his bed. He was not thinking of anything reprehensible. With the excuse of "if she is to sleep, then it would have to be here" fueling him, he diligently took to the task.

Then he set up the folding tea table, and placed two glasses on it. He took out canned beers from his tiny fridge, then lined them up next to the glasses.

(I have no intention of getting her drunk and doing something to her, but.....) Realizing that he was filled with ulterior motives already just by thinking that, he returned the beers to the fridge.

Well then, what next? The only thing he knew was that he could not manage to sit entirely still. Just when he was in the middle of wiping the dust off the TV with a tissue.....

"Sorry for having gone first. It's your turn now."

"Ahh, then I'll just— WHAT?!" The woman appeared in front of him, completely naked. Not a single thread on her. Completely in the nude. She was patting her silver hair dry with a bath towel, but otherwise, she wasn't even trying to hide her ample breasts, her tight waist, nor her perfect V-line.

"C-C-C-C-Clothes! Please put on clothes!"

"They're still wet."

“Th-Th-Th-Then!” Shouzou grabbed some T-shirts and shorts from a drawer and threw them to her while keeping his eyes closed. “There! I don’t care which ones you choose, just put something on already!”

“Thanks, I’ll choose something then.” Hearing those words behind his back, Shouzou somehow managed to dive into the bathroom while keeping his eyes half-closed. But he did manage to stub his pinky toe on the way and it hurt.

A while later—

After coming out of the shower himself, Shouzou sat down across the table from the beautiful woman with breasts so big that they were stretching out the shirt that she was wearing. Then, belatedly though it was, they finally got around to introducing themselves.

“My name is Silvia. In human years, I’m 22 years old. I’m a goddess.”

“I..... ahem, my name is Onigawara Shouzou. 28 years old. Company employee.”

The two bobbed their heads toward each other in greeting, but Shouzou’s head was filled with question marks.

What did she mean by “human years”? And “goddess”? What’s with her? Seemingly oblivious to Shouzou’s confusion, Silvia continued talking.

“This is my first time in the mortal realm. My initial aim was only to sightsee, but it’s already turned out much more worthwhile than I had expected. I’ve already managed to meet a wonderful gentleman such as yourself, have I not?”

“I see.....” Shouzou gulped down his beer. He had gone to the trouble of taking out glasses, but ended up drinking directly from the can in the end.

“Is this alcohol?” The woman stared curiously at the can sitting before her. Beside it was a bottle of tea that he had also brought out for her, but she didn’t give it even a glance.

“It is, but if you’re bad with alcohol—”

“No, that’s not it. It’s just that it’s my first time. Let me take a taste.” Silvia brought it to her mouth, then tilted the can at a sharp angle. She downed the beer so heartily that Shouzou found himself nearly falling for her.

Wait, this isn’t the time to be impressed.

“Wait! If you drink it that quickly your first time—”

“*Puha!* It’s delicious!” Silvia had already emptied the entire can, and her white skin had a faint red flush to it.

“Umm, you probably shouldn’t push yourself.....”

“Ahm fineee, ahahahaha ♪”

She’s already dead drunk?!

Silvia crawled toward the fridge on all fours, then made her way

back with several cans in her embrace. After that, she continued downing beers with gusto, all while chattering nonstop, albeit with very questionable articulation.

“I’ll ’ave you know, itsh my fursh time shpeakin’ alone wi’ a guy, awrigh?”

“Is, is that so. It’s also my first time being alone with a woman, so I am feeling quite nervous too.” While somehow processing her terribly slurred words inside his head, Shouzou tried his best to keep the conversation going.

“So wer boff fursh timersh—♪” Just as she seemed to be in a very merry mood, Shouzou heard snoring.

“Oh, she fell asleep.....” She eventually splayed herself over the tea table.

She would not wake up no matter how many times Shouzou shook her shoulder, so he carried her to bed. Her thin body was light, as expected. But the problem was, this softness that he was experiencing for the first time almost threatened to vaporize his sense of reason.

(Shouzou, this won’t do, it won’t! To even think of laying hands on a drunken woman.....)

After laying her down on the bed, he took a closer look at Silvia’s face.

Her beauty was such that he almost forgot to breathe. Perhaps all the stuff about her being a goddess may not have been a complete lie.

But then, blink. Silvia’s eyes opened.

Caught staring at her, Shouzou was so surprised that he felt like his heart was being clutched in a vice.

“No, um, this isn’t what it, I wasn’t trying to push you down.....” His flustered and incoherent justification evoked a giggle from Silvia.

“Don’t worry, I understand. You really are a kind person indeed. I had half-expected to be attacked when I was asleep, but you did nothing of the sort.” Her speech had returned to normal. Perhaps she had woken up from her drunken stupor after resting for a short while.

Or so Shouzou thought, before quickly learning how wrong he was.

“Dash why I’ll be da one to eat chu uppp ♪” Silvia abruptly sat up and pushed Shouzou down with such a strength that even the thick-muscled Shouzou could not throw her off.

“Wait, wait a moment. I... this is my first time—”

“Don’t worry, it’s fine.” Silvia’s articulation had returned once again. Or so he thought when, with a bright smile, she continued, “Ish my fursh time too♪”

“*Kyah—?!*”

Onigawara Shouzou, 28 years old. That night turned out to be the night he finally bid farewell to the virginity that he had been

protecting(?) up till then.

And after that, 13 years and 8 months flowed by—

Chapter 2: Teleported to Another World Along with the Entire House

At the beginning of April. It was a morning no different from any other, but this day was special.

Onigawara Shouzou, 41 years old, woke up in the morning and quickly groomed and dressed himself, just as he always had. His carefully ironed suit was almost dark enough to be a dress suit. Today, he was taking the day off work, planning instead to attend his daughter's entrance ceremony at her new middle school. After trimming his beard at the brand new bathroom sink, he put on his glasses and tried to soften his grim face a little.

Regardless of how it played out, his first impressions were always the worst. He was the very personification of the triple combo of "huge body," "fierce face," and "rough voice." The only person who did not cower with fear when meeting him the first time was, so far, his wife alone.

He wouldn't allow anything to ruin his daughter's big moment, so after checking his expression one last time, Shouzou made his way to the living room.

"How strange..... why isn't it showing anything? Ah, good morning, honey." In the living room, his wife Silvia was standing in front of the TV with the remote control in one hand and her head tilted in bewilderment. She was a silver-haired, blue-eyed drop dead beauty. And in spite of her delicate frame, two large masses protruded from her chest area.

She was six years younger than him, and she was still using honorific speech with him, despite having been married for 13 years and counting. However, she was still as young and beautiful as the day they met.

"What's the matter?" Shouzou asked, but a single glance was all that was needed to understand the situation. The TV screen was completely black, with the words "No Reception" displayed smack dab in the middle.

"Not a single channel works. We just bought it, is it already broken?"

"Maybe it's the antenna rather than the TV? Are the satellite channels not working either?"

"They are not. Not a single channel is working." His wife Silvia

looked truly at a loss. But her eyebrows being scrunched up together still did nothing to detract from her beauty.

“How about using magic to fix it, my dear goddess?”

Upon hearing Shouzou speak in a joke-like tone, Silvia blinked, then said, “Oh, my! Honey! How rare it is to hear you crack a joke.” She giggled with a *ufufu* in delight.

“Ha ha ha. It seems that I’m also in rather high spirits today. Well, the entrance ceremony is only until noon, so let’s call a technician after we get back.” At 41 years old, he had finally attained his dream of owning a brand new house. Yet within not even a week after moving in, a problem had already cropped up. Though it was quite a vexing matter, he did not want to attend his daughter’s big event in a bad mood.

Shouzou made an effort to act cheerful, heading toward the front entrance to pick up the morning newspaper. After passing through the spick and span hallway, he changed into his outdoor slippers at the doorway. Pushing open the door, he leaned out. Upon doing so—

He became dumbstruck at the magnificent view that greeted his eyes.

Several meters in front of him was a gate around chest high that was latched closed.

That was fine.

But what he expected to be there on the other side of that gate—such as a road and their neighbor’s house across the street—was gone without a trace. Their neighbors on either side were gone too.

The bare earth was sloping downward for several hundreds of meters off in the distance, until it spread out into a grassland. *Wait no, were those farms or fields?* There were tall grasses growing in orderly sections.

Then, far off in the distance, a city was visible.

Surrounded by high walls, it was a city that Shouzou had absolutely no recollection of.

His glance returned to his hand.

Inside the gate, there was the newspaper on the ground. The delivery guy was probably quite flustered too at this sudden unfamiliar sight.

On second thought, if the other side is really like what I’m seeing, then where did the delivery guy come in from? Shouzou pinched his cheek just once. *Ouch.*

He lumbered over to pick up the newspaper, then turned on his heels. Returning to the living room, he took a seat at the dining table set. His wife was nowhere to be seen. Presumably she had gone off to wake their children. On the table was a cup of fragrant coffee that had been prepared for him.

He pushed up his glasses, then spread open the newspaper. There had been a skirmish at some disputed border. There were the results of some pro sports matches. But at a glance, there wasn't any particularly inexplicable news.

He took out his smartphone. A quick scan of the article titles of several news sites also did not mention anything that particularly caught his eye.

He took a sip of his coffee, then sighed.

(What was that? What did I just see.....)

Just when he was considering going to take a second look, he heard a, "Dad, look!"

His eldest daughter, Yuna, flew into the living room with an excited voice. Clad in her brand new school uniform, she made a quick twirl, which caused her black ponytail to bounce around. She was 12 years old, and from that day onward, she was a first year middle school student.

"It suits you very well."

"Ehehe~ ♪"

Shouzou's face slackened slightly at her cute, adorable smile.

"Oh, Yuna, you've already gotten changed?"

Silvia came in. From behind her, a little girl with sparkling eyes appeared.

"Yuna-onee-sama, so cool!"

The youngest daughter, five-year-old Hina, was still in her pajamas. It was clear she had just gotten out of bed, as she was affected by a clear case of bedhead. Her hair was the color of glistening silver. Her eyes were also blue like the seas of a southern country, so it was clear to see that, out of the three siblings, she was the one who had inherited the most from Silvia's genes.

After the two of them, a young girl trailed in, looking sleepy still.

"It's already morning? I can't believe this..... Why doesn't anyone else think it strange that it becomes morning in an instant as soon as you fall asleep....." The middle daughter Kana, 10 years old, a fifth grader at a new elementary school as of today. She, too, was in her pajamas. Her short, brown hair contributed to her overall boyish impression.

The three sisters each had different hair and eye colors, but their faces all bore great resemblance to Silvia and were very lovely.

(I'm so glad they didn't take after me.....) Shouzou gave a quick prayer of thanks to the gods.

The three girls took their place at the table, and conversation blossomed as it always did.

"Is Hina-chan coming to the entrance ceremony too?" asked Yuna.

"Hina-sama is taking the day off preschool~!" Hina energetically

threw both arms into the air.

“Aww, lucky you. I want to take the day off too..... Why isn’t it summer break already.....” Kana rested her chin in her hands.

“Kana, didn’t your spring break end just the day before yesterday?”

“When humans become accustomed to a lifestyle with plenty of sleep, they find it difficult to revert from that.”

“Just wake up at the same time everyday, then.”

“What kind of person wouldn’t want to sleep in and laze around on their precious days off?”

“Kana-onee-sama is a lazybones-san~”

“Aww, now you’re making me embarrassed~”

“Kana, she was not complimenting you.”

The serious Yuna and free-spirited Kana did get into arguments at times, but Hina always managed to bring them back together harmoniously.

Kana was the only one who couldn’t make it to the entrance ceremony due to having classes of her own, so she was probably feeling a bit lonely due to that. But Yuna being Yuna, she was being considerate toward Kana’s feelings, so she was taking a gentler tone than usual.

All of them were growing up to be such good kids.

Shouzou did not want to destroy this happy lifestyle.

And that was why—

(The situation outside, I really do need to confirm it one more time.)

But the moment he renewed his resolve, his smartphone vibrated.

He had received a message on a messaging app.

[Department Head, are you all right?]

That was all it said.

What was that supposed to mean?

The person who had sent him the message was one of Shouzou’s subordinates. She was the new hope of the company’s sales department who, having joined the company three years ago, turned out to have a very forceful personality that belied her demure appearance.

What did she mean by “all right”? Could it be related to the abnormal sight outside? His curiosity piqued, Shouzou decided to call her instead of messaging back.

(.....*Out of range?*) However, when he tried doing so, a message along the general lines of “you cannot reach the number you are dialing because you are out of coverage range” appeared on his screen.

(What does that mean? I’m at home right now, so how can I be out of range.....) This hadn’t happened even once since he and his family

moved here.

At that moment, his phone began vibrating again.

This time, it was a call. However, it wasn't a call made through the phone service carrier, but through the messaging app.

But when he fiddled with the app to answer the call, an extremely flustered voice came out of the speaker.

[Is this the Department Head?!]

It was the same subordinate who had sent Shouzou the message.

"What's the matter?"

[What do you mean "what's the matter"?! Department Head, where are you right now?!]

"I'm at home. What about it?"

[No way.....]

"What do you mean 'no way'? But anyways, that aside, is there an issue that came up? You sound awfully flustered."

[But Department Head, your house! It's completely disappeared!]

"Hah?"

A weird sound came out of Shouzou's mouth.

His family members turned toward him with questioning looks.

[It's being reported on the TV right now that a house disappeared in its entirety within a single night.]

Apparently a short clip uploaded to the internet had gone viral almost instantaneously and thus got picked up by a morning news channel.

Struck with astonishment at hearing the phrase "Onigawara Shouzou-san's residence," she had tried calling him, but was told that he was out of range. That was why she tried sending him a message. Seeing that the message was read quickly then prompted her to attempt calling him through the app.

"Yes, even my smartphone is saying that I'm out of network coverage range. But I still have internet access. There's no problem with our power and water either."

But the TV didn't display anything.

(*Could it be that the airwaves can't reach us.....?*) The house internet was connected through a fiber optic cable. And it was from there that they had Wi-Fi spread throughout the house. The call happening through the messaging app was being handled this way instead.

In addition, the news channel had apparently also found their newspaper delivery guy, who commented that when he threw the newspaper into their now vacant lot, the newspaper had disappeared too.

Everything was a bewildering whirlwind of chaos, but that made it all the more imperative for him to confirm and get a grasp on the situation. For the moment, Shouzou hung up the phone. In any case,

he wouldn't be able to continue the call anyway if anything else unexpected cropped up.

"Honey....." Anxiety flickered in Silvia's eyes. The children also looked worried.

"Apparently our entire house has been moved somewhere else. I'm going to check the situation outside. You all stay here."

"But....."

"Don't worry. No matter what happens, I will protect my family." The wrinkles around Shouzou's brows deepened as cracking sounds also rang out clearly from his knuckles.

But that moment.

Ding do~ng

Their doorbell rang, and their intercom flickered to life.

Unease ran through the family.

Shouzou gestured for his wife to remain seated, then headed toward the intercom.

On the LCD screen was the figure of a woman.

It was a young woman with long hair wearing a suit that made her look like she was there for a job interview.

"Who might you be?" Shouzou asked in a wary voice.

In response, the woman said something very strange indeed.

"I am a goddess who's come here from the celestial realm."

After a short moment of dumbfoundedness, "We're good, thanks."

Shouzou reflexively turned off the intercom—



Despite having reflexively turned off the intercom, Shouzou understood that the self-proclaimed goddess might be the key to understanding how they could resolve the current situation, so he eventually invited her in.

After coming into the house, he directed her to the Japanese-style guest room.

With a low table in between, he and the woman confronted each other.

"Um, I'm sorry this isn't much, but....."

How considerate it was to receive a visitor bearing gifts this early in the morning.

"So then, who are you?" Shouzou thought he managed a gentle tone, but the woman started and averted her eyes.

"I, I am, um, this is who I am....." She held out a namecard.

"..... Administrative Bureau of Reincarnation and Transmigration? Emalia-san?" Almost all of it seemed suspect, but the word "transmigration" did catch his attention.

The woman, Emalia shuffled backward hurriedly, then—

“We are truly sorry for what happened!!!” She pounded her forehead against the floor in dogeza.

“While conducting the final test run of our new transmigration system, we mistakenly transmigrated your entire house to this world.” Emalia ground her forehead against the tatami floor.

Shouzou exhaled a breath. “Please raise your head. I’m not asking for an apology. Let’s move toward a more constructive conversation.”

“A-As you say..... I am much obliged.....” Emalia raised her upper body. Timidly returning to her original position, she kept her head down low in fear, only looking at Shouzou in quick, occasional glances.

Silvia prepared tea and placed it before the two of them. Then she withdrew to a position diagonally behind Shouzou and sat in seiza.

With another “Much obliged” Emalia shrunk even deeper into herself.

While slightly vexed at the timidity of his visitor, Shouzou quietly questioned her.

“Leaving aside the points that I find hard to understand, the main gist is that due to a fault in some mysterious system on your end, all of us have been caught up in the ensuing aftermath?”

“Rather than a ‘fault,’ it wa—Eep! Y-Yes, that’s the general gist of it!” Emalia’s fumbling for words was cut short with a single direct glance from Shouzou. The sharp glint in his eyes had apparently made her shudder. In a fluster, she began to babble excuses.

“N-Normally this is something that would never happen. The transmigration system sets ‘individuals’ as the target when conducting transmigrations, so this is the very first time that it has happened to an entire house along with everything in it, and even we are scrambling to identify the cause and—”

“Emalia-san.”

“Yessir?!”

“I have no intention of assigning blame for something that has already happened. Neither would there be any point in me pressing you to identify the cause. So let’s leave all that for a later time. All I want is one thing, and that is for everything to be returned to its original state.”

“It, it is indeed as you say..... But, it’s just that, um.....” Emalia once again reverted to fumbling for words.

Shouzou was getting quite irritated by then, but he consciously made an effort to hold himself in check, understanding that an emotional outburst from him would only serve to further delay the conversation.

“It will be difficult in a short time frame?”

“As long as the cause remains undetermined, it’s hard to..... And

even when the cause is determined, we would still have to correct the system error and conduct retests, so it seems it might take a year at the earliest.....”

“A whole year?”

“Y-Yes, I’m sorry..... Ah, but! For some reason, this time, a connection to the previous world remains. Power, gas, water, internet, basically everything that goes through cable communications and normal plumbing systems, all that is still perfectly usable. Furthermore, anything that is left on your lot would get sent over to this side, so all packages that don’t contain anything alive can reach you without issue. I think there won’t be any significant impact on your lifestyle—”

“Emalia-san.”

“Yessir?! ”

“Even if things are fine at the moment, seeing as how even you said ‘for some reason,’ that means we have no guarantee that this lifeline would remain indefinitely. On top of that, I have a job, my daughters have school, and my wife has her socializing with everyone in our neighborhood. Not being able to carry on in our normal lives as a part of society would be a very serious problem indeed.”

“It, it is indeed as you say, sir.....”

“Today is our eldest daughter’s very important entrance ceremony. Can you send just the five of us back right now?” Despite making his voice as gentle as possible, Emalia only got more visibly dejected.

“Is that impossible as well?”

“As I explained earlier, the transmigration system operates by sending ‘individuals’ to other worlds. Belongings are bound to the individual, then sent along together. This time however, for whatever reason, the house is the transmigration target, and all five of you are bound to the house. To send a bound target separately, and furthermore for the targets to be alive, I’m afraid that would be rather difficult.....”

But that was not all.

“The new system that caused the issue this time processes the information of transmigration targets in a completely different way from the old system. Naturally, backward compatibility is possible, but the opposite—using the old system to return a target sent by the new system—is impossible.” She further added that the old system was incapable of returning a target from a new world back to Japan once again.

“In other words, at the current moment, we have no option but to wait for the new system to be fixed?”

“Yes..... That is the case.....”

Shouzou looked up at the ceiling.

He somehow managed to suppress the urge to slam his fist onto the table. Railing at Emalia would not resolve the situation. Neither would venting his anger make him feel any better.

(One year..... a whole year. Wait, no, she said 'at the earliest.' Including the time needed for them to identify the issue, it might be even longer than that.) They had savings. They might have to live a bit frugally, but it should be enough to last them for two years.

However, their connection to their original world was not guaranteed. It would not be strange for it to be severed at any moment.

“So will your side provide us any support for our livelihood? Specifically, living expenses, or guaranteed support for crucial instances?”

“Th-That’s.....”

“Don’t tell me your side’s stance is to ‘survive somehow’ without any intention of providing support?”

“No, of course not! Normally, it is forbidden to have further contact with targets after their transmigration, but this time is an irregularity and the fault lies with us, so as special treatment—”

Emalia placed a hand on her own modest chest and said, “I have been assigned to stay here to do all I can to support everyone’s livelihood—”

“Rejected.”

“Eeep?!”

“Ah, sorry, I couldn’t help it..... However, what is it specifically that you can do to support us?”

“I’ll find a job.”

Shouzou looked up at the ceiling again.

“I cannot use my powers as a goddess in the mortal realm, and my powers have been restricted quite significantly in the first place, so my ability might not seem much at a glance, but at the very least, I will earn enough to support your family’s livelihood—”

“Ahh, that’s enough. That’s enough, Emalia-san.”

“I’m sorry?”

“You’ve clearly just been forced to take the fall.”

Within Emalia’s speech and conduct, he could feel a sense of desperation and resignation from time to time. Having been a salesman for so long, and having sat across from so many people during that time, Shouzou could tell.

“I really hate this from the bottom of my heart, but I was ordered to by a superior so I have no choice” was coming across so loudly that it almost hurt.

After a brief instant of astonishment, tears began gushing out from

her eyes in huge drops.

“It was just, I’ve only been doing admin work in the celestial realm the entire time, and, and it’s my first time descending to the mortal realm, and I was just so worried.....” Wordlessly, Silvia moved to sit beside the bawling goddess.

“It must have been so hard for you. But it’s all right now. We’re here with you. You can rely on us as much as you want.”

“Madam..... *uwaaaaaan!*” Emalia buried her face in Silvia’s bountiful breasts.

Silvia kindly patted her head the entire time as she cried her eyes out.

When she had calmed down enough, Shouzou asked her about all the various paperwork regarding him taking leave from work and about his daughters taking a leave of absence from their schools.

In response, he was told that all relevant coordination, which also included disclosure of information to the Japanese government, was being handled by Emalia’s superiors.

Shouzou took a sip of tea.

“So, do you have any clue as to what caused the issue?”

The longer that took, the longer their return to their previous world would take. Consequently, it was of utmost importance.

“We are not entirely without a clue. The current hypothesis is that a massive magic source interfered with the transmigration system’s functions. We had never detected this source previously, so it must have been very skillfully concealed. And it just so happened that this very significant magic source was present in the Onigawara residence. That’s all we know at the moment.”

Hm? Shouzou tilted his head.

“A powerful magic source.....?”

“Indeed. One so significant that it ranks as goddess class..... and a Grade 1 goddess level, at that. We find it hard to believe that such a magic source actually exists in the mortal realm, but still..... Ah, by the way, I am a Grade 7 goddess. I’m really sorry for being such a small potato.....”

Shouzou looked up at the ceiling for the third time.

Then he brought his gaze back down to shoot a glance at his wife who was, at the moment, still next to Emalia.

“Silvia, could it be.....” He couldn’t manage to say the rest, but their many years together enabled his wife to catch on to what he wanted to say.

“Yes. It appears that I was the cause.”

“Eh?” Emalia let out a stupid-sounding voice.

Silvia became visibly dejected.

Shouzou immediately comforted his wife.

“None of the responsibility lies with you. Not including something so significant when testing a system on a scale large enough to actually affect society just ‘because it’s beyond expectations’? That can only be an excuse.”

“Thank you, honey.....”

“Eh? Eh? Um, wait, what? What are you two talking about.....?”

Seeing Emalia’s look of utter confusion, Silvia placed a hand on her shoulder.

Then she told her straight.

“I am a goddess. A Grade 1 goddess.”

Emalia stared at her dazedly for a brief moment, then—

“EHHHHHHHHHHHH!!” A really loud shout reverberated throughout the house.



The stunningly beautiful girl that he met on that rainy summer night, Silvia.

That night, after being pushed down by her, they encountered success on the first try. She became pregnant with Yuna, their eldest daughter.

It was one of those so-called “shotgun weddings.”

While insisting on declaring herself a “goddess,” Silvia said, “Now that I have formed a relationship with someone in the mortal realm, I cannot return to the celestial realm anymore. You will be taking responsibility for me, yes?”

Though it sort of sounded like a threat, as someone who had absolutely zero luck with women so far, there wasn’t a single reason for Shouzou to say no.

Or rather, he welcomed it very much. It wasn’t even an exaggeration to call it the jackpot, an overwhelming victory.

But “goddess”? “Celestial realm”? Was that some kind of secret lingo? When he had just met her, Shouzou hadn’t the faintest idea what it meant, but—

Emalia asked back in a quivering voice.

“In other words, Madam is a goddess? Like me? Like..... a ‘goddess’ goddess.....?”

“That’s what I said.”

“And she’s a Grade 1 goddess, much higher rank than me.....?”

“That’s what I said as well.”

“No, no, no, no! Why is a Grade 1 goddess a homemaker in a place like this?!”

“A place like this? That’s rude of you.”

“Hah?! No, sorry, that was a slip of the tongue. I’m very sorry.....” Emalia shrunk into herself in dejection, but almost immediately

started, then her head shot up as if she had just realized something.

What a busy girl she was.

“More like, why is the master so calm about it? She’s a goddess! A Grade 1 goddess! The wife that has been beside you for all these years! Why aren’t you surprised?!”

“I don’t really get the whole goddess ranking system, but the fact that my wife is ‘a goddess’ is something that I’ve known for ages.” Naturally, at the start, he didn’t actually believe that she was a real goddess.

—*“Strictly speaking, I’m not supposed to do this in the mortal realm. But just for you.”*

However, after seeing her create fire out of thin air and fly around the sky for a bit, he had no choice but to believe.

“Even if that’s the case, how can you accept it so easily?!”

“What reason could I have to reject it?”

Normally, Silvia was just a typical stunning beauty. Even after their marriage, she was a sociable homemaker who got along well with all their neighbors. Her being a goddess or not was a trivial matter for Shouzou.

“What is with this married couple.....*cough cough*. I beg your pardon. In other words, could it be that my support is actually not needed at all in this situation?”

“It’s true that even though I’m retired, my magic capacity and yours is still three digits apart. If we fought, it would end within the blink of an eye,” said Silvia.

“Please stop scaring me.....”

“However, since I formed a relationship with someone in the mortal realm, my ties with the celestial realm have been completely cut. This is why we will need Emalia-san to serve as the go-between.”

“Th-That’s right, I suppose. That’s all I’m needed for, it seems.....” The light almost faded completely from Emalia’s eyes.

It seemed like she had already suffered rather significant damage, but the conversation was not over yet.

“So would I be correct in understanding that the cause is now identified?”

“Heh? Ah, yes. May I report it to my superiors?”

Silvia placed a hand on her cheek and sighed.

“There’s no helping it, I suppose. But now that this has happened, I can use my magic again without worry.”

“Ahh, since you’ve been taking precautions so far to hide your real identity.”

“Ha ha ha” went the intimate couple as they laughed together jovially.

“It’s forbidden to use magic in a mortal realm!”

“But my ties with the celestial realm have been completely cut, and my powers have already been restricted. The situation being what it is, I won’t take no for an answer, all right?” Emalia thought she saw a jet-black aura rising up behind Silvia’s gentle smile. She shivered like a kitten abandoned in the heart of winter.

Can I go back already.....

“So then, Emalia-san.”

“Yessir?!”

“Stop being frightened at everything. So anyways, where will you be staying from now on?”

“Eh? Ahh, umm..... I was planning on setting up a tent right beside this house.” The realization that the unavailability of support in the form of local currency—which meant that staying in an inn would be beyond her means—left Emalia’s shoulders slumped in despondency.

At that moment, the voice of a goddess with an outstretched hand reached her ears.

“How would you like to stay in this guest room?”

“May I really?!” She shot a quick glance at Shouzou, who was “hmming” with arms crossed.

“We can’t in good conscience allow a young lady to stay outdoors.”

“Thank you so very much! I’ll go bring my tent in right now!”

““You’re going to set it up in here?!””

“I’m sorry, I was just so flustered..... I’m going to bring a futon then.”

“We have a futon for guests, so just use that.”

“I am very much obliged, again and again.....”

After a while, Shouzou patted his chest in relief. For the moment, the cause had been identified. So at the earliest, they might get to go back to their original world in a year’s time.

They’d ended up accepting Emalia as a lodger, but having an older sister-like presence of a similar age (in terms of appearance) to their eldest daughter Yuna might give the kids some sense of reassurance.

“Ah, I’d forgotten!” shouted Emalia. She looked down at the ground uncomfortably.

They had finally managed to end things on a more positive note, yet now it seemed she still had bad news to convey.

“What is it?”

“It really does pain me to say this, but.....” Emalia closed her eyes tightly. “Normally, during the transmigration process, a special ability or power is bestowed upon the target. After all, ‘Freely and cheerfully enjoy your second chance at life’ is the approach that our bureau

takes. However, this time, because the target of the transfer was the house, everyone was treated as bound accessories, which meant that.....”

“None of us get a special ability?”

“I am really, truly, very sorry!” Emalia shuffled backward and dove into a dogeza again.

Despite her various unreliable aspects, Shouzou found himself in appreciation of, at the very least, how polished her dogeza was.

“We have no need for special abilities or anything like that.” Just being able to live normal lives was more than enough. That was what Shouzou truly believed from the bottom of his heart.

However, Emalia once again dribbled out even more bad news.

“Truthfully speaking, there are things called ‘magic beasts’ that live in this world.....”

“‘Magic beasts’.....? I take it that you’re not talking about bears or wolves or beasts of that sort?”

“W-Well, it’s a wide range, from things of that level, to things of cataclysmic levels that can wipe out entire cities by themselves..... like dragons, for example.....”

“Why is it that time and time again, you offer such important information only at the very end?”

“I’m really, really sorry..... Oh, but! If a barrier is set up using magic, then there would be no need to fear them. Since it affects the safety of all of you, I have been granted special permission to use my powers for this.” Emalia blew out a breath and delivered her previous words with full confidence.

“Hmm,” said Shouzou while crossing his arms.

“In other words, at the moment we are in a defenseless state unprotected by a barrier?”

All the blood drained out of Emalia’s face.

Shouzou found himself once again in astonishment at how scatterbrained this goddess was.

And as they say, “When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.”

Running footsteps pounded down the hallway toward the guest room.

“Dad, it’s terrible!” The eldest daughter, Yuna, rushed into the room in a fluster.

“There’s something gigantic in the yard!” In quick succession, in came the second daughter, Kana. “It’s a doggy-sama~” The youngest daughter, Hina, seemed to find it all rather quite amusing.

“So one of those so-called magic beasts has already shown up.” After being relieved at seeing his daughters safe, Shouzou made to get up, but was abruptly stopped by what his daughters continued to tell

him.

“But Dad, it’s strange.”

“It’s slamming its body against our house really hard, but—”

“Our new house is so strong~!” Apparently, in spite of the magic beast’s effort to break their windows, the house had remained steadfast all throughout. Come to think of it, there wasn’t even an audible sound of impact.

Emalia started with a shout.

“So that’s how it is! This house is the transmigration target. That’s why it got a cheat ability!”

“We would have really appreciated it if you’d properly confirmed that sort of thing first before coming in.”

“*Hauu*, I’m sorry.....” Apparently the state of affairs was not as urgent as it’d first seemed. But with that said, neither was it something that could remain unaddressed.

Shouzou got up, then headed toward the living room. Everyone else followed behind him in single file. At the end of the first floor hallway, upon opening the door, a glass sliding door that reached from the floor to the ceiling came into view. On the other side of it, a dog the size of an elephant was glaring straight at them.

Its pure black fur looked as sharp as needles. Its bared fangs seemed very similar to western broadswords. The magic beast seemed to be in the middle of a short break, as its long tongue was lolling out while its shoulders were heaving up and down heavily.

“It’s a hellhound! To think that such a big one was in the vicinity.....” Despite the chills she was feeling, Emalia tried her best to remain calm and analyze the situation.

“Please don’t provoke it. After a while, it should give up and just go away on its own.”

But then Shouzou took a step forward.

“But that means it might come attack us again at any time, right?”

“Eh? Well, that’s..... but once I set up the barrier.....”

Shouzou took another step.

“But that means my daughters won’t be able to run around and play outside.”

“Heh? Well, that’s..... but safety is top priority.....”

Shouzou’s steps brought him quickly toward the window.

“Naturally, the safety of my family is top priority.”

“Then—”

“Therefore!” Shouzou was mad. Blood rushed to his head.

Too much had happened today already.

Their house was transmigrated to another world out of the blue. The person sent to do the explaining was timid and jumping at everything and just completely useless in general.

Then this. This was the final straw.

He shot a quick glance behind him. There stood the family that he loved so very dearly.

The constantly naïve and bubbly Hina aside, Yuna, and even the usually full-of-herself Kana looked frightened and worried.

This..... *thing* had frightened his beloved daughters. That in itself was a crime worthy of death!

Shouzou undid the latch to the glass door, then threw it open.

“Master, what are you—?!”

His family’s safety was of utmost priority. Anything that threatened their bright, fun, and carefree livelihood, no matter what it may be—

“Elimination!” *Thud.*

Shouzou stepped outside in his bare feet.

The gigantic black magic beast crouched low and snarled while fixing its sight on Shouzou.

The exchange of glances lasted but a few seconds.

“GRRRR!” The magic beast lunged at Shouzou. With saliva spraying everywhere, it opened its maw wide to snap Shouzou up.

But in response—

Shouzou bent his knees. Immediately afterward, he lightly lifted the palm of his hand.

Gachi~in!! [Gafun?!] The palm of his hand connected perfectly with the magic beast’s chin.

The large maw that missed its target was forcibly slammed shut, with the sound of the top and bottom racks of teeth crashing together ringing out loudly. The magic beast’s upper body shot up into the air, and it did a complete backflip before landing on its back.

The magic beast had apparently suffered a concussion, because it just laid there, twitching. Eventually, it shivered, then slowly got to its feet while quivering.

Shouzou looked on, then slowly inhaled deeply.

All of the children clapped their hands over their ears in synchronized motions.

Immediately afterward—

“GET LOST!!” A single shout tore the air apart.

“*Piee?!?*” The startled voice was from Emalia. The loud sound had caused her legs to give way.

“*Kyaun, kyau kyauun!*” The magic beast leaped up, then ran away as fast as it could.

Shouzou turned around as if nothing had happened and made to step back into the living room, but realized that he was barefoot.

“Honey, thank you for keeping us safe. Here you go.” His wife Silvia had brought over a wet towel. As expected of a couple that had

spent so many years together. Shouzou accepted it with a word of thanks, then wiped the soles of his feet clean first before coming back into the living room.

“As expected of Dad!”

“Papa so awesome—!”

“Otoo-sama, so cool~!”

His children crowded around him. Shouzou’s expression softened as he hugged all three of them at once.

Something that was a matter of course, performed as a matter of course.

Seeing the family reacting the way they did, Emalia felt faint while opening her mouth to ask.

“Master..... who, are you.....?” It was a very natural question to ask.

However, for Shouzou, it was an incomprehensible question.

He was no one special enough to merit the question “Who are you?”

The only thing that set him apart from other people was that he had taken a goddess as a wife.

“Just your average company employee.”

“Like hell you are!” Emalia was so bewildered that she unconsciously slipped into casual speech and shouted out loud.

“*Hauu*, I’m sorry, that was rude of me..... But, but, but that’s strange! How can an average company employee take out a hellhound with a single punch?!” Her question, delivered from her position still sitting on the floor, merely caused Shouzou to blush and avert his eyes.

“I, in front of the kids? That’s a bit.....”

What’s he blushing about? This middle-aged man.

Emalia turned her gaze toward Silvia in search of an answer, only to get a very bashful “*Iyaan*.”

Yuna was also looking down in clear embarrassment.

“Nn? What? What’re we talking about?”

“A good woman has her secrets~”

“Uh, Papa is a guy though?”

“A good man has them too~” Clearly the two younger daughters hadn’t a clue.

Emalia once again turned her gaze back toward Shouzou, at which

“Well then, I suppose I should step out for a bit.”

Was he trying to dodge the topic?

“More like, where is the master planning on going?”

“I hardly think that was the only magic beast close by. I’m going to quickly chase away every single one that lives in this area.”

Emalia could not find anything to say in response to Shouzou's glittering eyes.

"Silvia, can you set up the barrier or whatever it is?"

"Not a problem. I'll have it up in the blink of an eye."

"All right, I'll leave that to you then." The married couple went ahead and continued the conversation while leaving Emalia behind.

The poor goddess could do nothing except just stare at Shouzou's large back as it headed toward the front door in an overbearing manner.

It was only with Silvia's help that Emalia finally managed to stand back up. So much had happened today that she just wanted to get back quickly and take a rest. However, she just couldn't make herself let the matter go.

"Madam, why is the master so strong? I'm only guessing, but the feeling that I get is that he's much stronger than even me, even though I come from the celestial realm!"

"In terms of sheer strength, he is actually above even me, a Grade 1 goddess. After all, he did just physically repel a magic beast."

"All the more so, then! How did an 'average company worker' gain strength that exceeds even that of us goddesses?!"

Silvia's cheeks once again flushed red bashfully.

Then she brought her mouth close to Emalia's ears, who was looking decidedly unamused at seeing this reaction again.

"Our connection of love, that's the reason."

"I'm sorry, come again?"

"Did you not know? When a 'human' is deeply, dee~ply connected to a god or goddess, both in heart and body, they are bestowed a huge blessing of love." Silvia covered her blazing cheeks with her hands, as if to hide her bashfulness.

Befuddled, Emalia's gaze panned away.

Three cute girls were looking her way with blank faces.

In other words, the "human," clearly Shouzou, gained strength that exceeds that of the gods because, together with Silvia, a Grade 1 goddess, he performed a certain act that led to the creation of these children.....

"IT'S MY FIRST TIME HEARING SOMETHING LIKE THAT THOUGH?!"

"Well, the effect of doing it just once or twice is almost negligible, after all. But the two of us, when we got married, oh my we just, *every single night*, and even now we are still..... *ufufu*!"

Emalia found herself gazing at the Grade 1 goddess who was once again blushing to the tips of her ears.

(.....*Just go explode.*)

Emalia found herself clicking her tongue repeatedly inside her

head.

Chapter 3: Job Hunting in Another World

It had already been one week since the Onigawara residence was transmigrated in its entirety.

Procedures for taking leave from school and work were completed without incident, and Shouzou had finished handing off all his work to his subordinates through email and his phone.

They had also confirmed that they could indeed receive packages properly from their original world.

Furthermore, in order to prevent illegal dumping, a fence had been set up around their lot and covered with a tarp. Arrangements were also made to station a security guard (with the Japanese government bearing the cost) to keep watch over the place.

But above everything else, what worried Shouzou the most was his daughters' education.

Now that it had become impossible for them to attend school, there was no choice but to turn to homeschooling. As communication lines were still functional, Shouzou was about to look into arranging classes over the internet when—

“Um, may I help with tutoring the children?” Their freeloader goddess spoke up with that proposal, so he decided to take her up on her offer.

Incidentally, in human years, she was 19 years old.

Though he never did learn what “human years” actually meant for goddesses.

The teaching materials were sent over from Japan, and Emalia was to closely guide the two older children through the public school curriculum.

As for Hina, who was not old enough for school yet, she would draw pictures next to her older sisters, take naps, run about outside, and basically just live like a free spirit.

Shouzou was not informed of the exact details that had been discussed between the gods and the Japanese government.

But afterward, he received simple instructions from the government that could be broadly summarized under two categories:

1. Under general circumstances, abide by the instructions of the stationed goddess.
2. Do not propagate information about the other world.

(Contact with mass media is forbidden. Communication at the personal level is fine.)

When all was said and done, their family life in the other world was gradually settling into place.

However, late at night after the kids had fallen asleep, Shouzou had a talk with Silvia and Emalia.

“We don’t know how long our money and our house’s enigmatic connection to Japan will last, so we need to prepare accordingly. For the moment, we are still able to buy our daily necessities through online shopping, but there’s a limit to our savings. I believe that we really do need to secure a steady income of local currency in preparation for the worst.”

“Agreed, honey.”

“As someone who is staying for free, that had been my intention at the very start, but now.....”

“Emalia-san, we’ve already tasked you with tutoring the children. We cannot burden you with anything more.”

“But Madam, you are also busy with housework, are you not? Which means that—”

Shouzou nodded understandingly. “I will find a job,” he declared decisively.



The next morning.

“Well then, off I go.” Shouzou stood at the house entrance wearing a stylish suit. In his hand was his sturdy attaché case. Inside it was the love-filled bento prepared by his wife.

“Take care, honey.”

“Hope it goes well, Dad.”

“Papa, good luck~”

“Otoo-sama, *fighto~!*”

Being sent off by his entire family caused Shouzou’s stoic face to crumble in happiness.

“On second thought, shouldn’t I come along after all?”

“Emalia-san, please put your all into our daughters’ studies.”

Kana, the middle daughter, tsked inadvertently. She clearly wasn’t a big fan of studying.

Shouzou left the entrance behind and stepped through the gate.

Looking down from the small hill on which their house stood, there were wheat fields as far as the eye could see. Then far in the distance, on the other side of the fields, stood a city encircled by a tall stone wall.

Shouzou exhaled softly, then set off with light steps.

While making his way through the wheat fields, he exchanged

greetings with the old grannies who were busy tending to the fields.

“Oh my, Onigawara-san. Good mor—”

“Good (ㄗ) morning (ㄗ) gggg.....” He sped past while leaving the Doppler effect in his wake.

During the past week, they had already finished greeting all their new neighbors.

But with that said, there weren’t actually any houses nearby. Apparently, everyone lived in the walled city.

As magic beasts frequently roamed this area, it was determined to be uninhabitable. The fields were protected by a magic fence that turned away the magic beasts that were herbivores, and the workers stayed on their guard during the day against the more ferocious, carnivorous magic beasts.

But upon further investigation, it turned out that the danger was not as great as he first thought. Magic beasts could be easily chased off with a certain powder that released a particular smell that all magic beasts hated. However, the smell of that powder was just too pungent, which was why it wasn’t feasible to build houses out here and rely on it for protection.

There was also a slight situation behind how the family was able to communicate normally with the locals.

In normal transmigration cases, an interpretation skill would be granted to the target automatically. But due to the irregularity of this case, this did not happen with the Onigawara family. So the issue of language was resolved somehow thanks to Silvia’s magic. As expected of a Grade 1 goddess.

The unpaved road that led to the city had deep grooves that threatened to trip him up if he didn’t pay attention. Along the way, he overtook three carriages, before arriving at the entrance of the city in around 20 minutes. It was a journey of roughly 20 kilometers.

The fortified city of Treia.

It was a relatively large city that had a population of over 100,000. With a diameter of about 8 kilometers, it was entirely encircled by a high castle wall. A river flowed on the other side of the city and, thanks to it, apparently the city was outfitted with both water and sewage systems. This city was one of the most developed ones in this entire world.

On the outer side of the castle walls was a moat, and there were drawbridges at each of the four cardinal directions. All traffic that passed through was inspected.

Shouzou got into line. Thirty minutes later, he displayed his pass and was allowed in. This pass was something that Emalia had prepared for him as a ‘just in case’ on the third day after the transmigration. Today was his first time putting it to use.

The inside of the city was paved with cobblestone, and houses built with stone laid in rows upon rows. Shouzou proceeded down the main avenue while weaving through the crowds.

(Well then, having come this far on momentum is all well and good, but.....) Would there be a place that would hire a walk-in? Shouzou had no experience with changing jobs. Places that would be willing to hire a 41-year-old middle-aged man would surely be limited. Furthermore, he also wasn't familiar with the workings of this world.

He didn't actually expect to find a job today, but he knew that the longer it took, the more unease it would cause.

But above all else, the issue that he feared would prove to be the biggest obstacle of all was his own frightening countenance. By all appearances, he was not suitable for sales. Not with his hulking build. Not with that face of his, which had plunged the hearts of everyone he met for the first time into terror. In fact, the reason why he got hired for sales back in his youth was due to his superior's rather absurd expectation of him to take full advantage of his frightening appearance to threaten opposing parties into signing contracts with the company.

Long story short, that plan fell through, and Shouzou couldn't manage to sign any contracts at all for quite a while after he joined the company.

(Though I suppose I am grateful that I got the job in the first place.....) Recalling his bachelor days put him in a slightly melancholic mood.

But abruptly, the sight of a certain silhouette approaching from Shouzou's front gave him a start.

It was a lizard.

A lizard even larger than Shouzou was wearing clothes and walking on two feet.

(If I remember correctly, that's a "lizardman," right?) The topic of "demihumans" had been included in the information that Emalia had taught him about this world.

Apparently, this world was populated by numerous non-human races.

They possess intelligence equal to that of humans, and communication through language was possible. And many of them possess higher or lower physical and magical ability in comparison with humans, respective to their race.

That was who the demihumans were. Their appearance came in all shapes and forms, with some races having an appearance that caused them to be easily mistaken for magic beasts at times. But the method to distinguish them was simple. "If they are wearing clothes and walking upright, then they're a demihuman." That was what Emalia had told him.

Shouzou stood still, yielding the way for the male (probably) lizardman.

The lizardman narrowed his eyes, and quickly bobbed his head while walking past.

Shouzou had a thought. If this was a world where individuals even larger than him with appearances that look even less human than him could walk down the street normally, then could it be that people won't be as frightened of him?

He cut across the main avenue. His eyes were fixed on an eatery.

(Which means that I could also consider trying the service industry.)

With that thought in mind, he carefully observed the shop.

Very few people were going in, but a lot of people were coming out, despite it being morning.

Currently, it was around 9 a.m. It was around the time when many businesses began to open their doors. Shouzou guessed that these were people who had gone in to grab breakfast earlier, and that they were now all heading to work.

(I see. Could it be that the residents of this city eat outside most of the time?) He recalled that time when he had visited China for a business trip.

There, he had seen eateries that were bustling since early in the morning. From what he was told afterward, a lot of people there ate breakfast outside.

(If I recall correctly, the reason was because a lot of families had both parents working.) Surely there was a cultural side to it as well.

In Japan, a significant number of people did not eat breakfast, while another significant portion would just buy an onigiri from a convenience store or choose some other equally quick breakfast, so the only stores that opened early in the morning were the fast food chains.

(But recalling all that random stuff won't help me now. Let's go for broke.) Challenging himself to break into an unfamiliar industry might not be so bad.

Shouzou shored up his resolve, then practically dove into the eatery that he had his eye on—

—Long story short, there wasn't a single anchor for him to cling to! The sudden appearance of a huge, middle-aged man had caused the store owner to go pale, and then he had even raised a fuss about calling the city guards.

Unfortunately, what was scary would remain scary.

Upon earnestly and humbly expressing his desire for employment, the store owner eventually regained his calm, but still firmly turned him down with a "We are not hiring at the moment."

That definitely took the wind out of Shouzou's sails.

However, he couldn't allow himself to feel down about it for long. So he went ahead to assault the next eatery. They were busy with preparations for lunch time so they chased him out.

Even so, Shouzou did not give up.

"41 years old? If only you were 20 years younger....."

"Man, your scary face would only make the food taste bad."

"You can't cook? The hell are you here for, then?"

People said all sorts of things to him.

However, not everybody was so mean about it.

"Wouldn't you be more suited for manual labor?"

"With that body of yours, I can't imagine any job other than 'adventurer' being suitable for you."

"Did you get injured somewhere that forced you to retire?"

At least some people cared enough to give him suggestions or expressed concern for him.

(*Adventurer, huh.....*) Standing still in the middle of the main avenue, Shouzou mulled over what he was told.

Emalia had also explained the profession of "adventurer" to him. The image that Shouzou had was more like a treasure hunter who would go looking for treasure inside ruins and caves. But judging by what he had heard from the people in this city, it seemed that the truth might be a bit different.

To put it simply, they were more jacks of all trades that accepted quests, completed said quests, then got paid for it. The variety of quests was very large, ranging from killing magic beasts for their materials, to serving as a bodyguard. But generally speaking, most quests included a certain degree of danger. With the power bestowed upon him thanks to his Grade 1 goddess wife, making a name for himself as an adventurer might be rather easy to do.

(*But if material gathering is based on the assumption of killing magic beasts, that kind of goes against my principles.....*) Despite being frequently misunderstood due to his fearful appearance, Shouzou was a man whose principles wouldn't allow him to kill even bugs. (*Cases when my family is in danger are exceptions, of course.*) Though to be fair, it seemed that adventurers had the freedom to choose what quests they take on.

(*If it's serving as a bodyguard, I would be able to use my appearance to good effect. Just by being there, I would probably serve as an effective deterrent.*) Though admitting it himself only made him sad.

Shouzou began to gather information about being an adventurer by asking passersby.

Adventurers register at an adventurer's guild. Once their registration is finalized and accepted, they can accept quests from any of a large number of adventurer's guilds. The scale of adventurer's

guilds ranged from very tiny to very large, and the contents of quests also varied greatly.

And as luck would have it, this city had a thriving adventurer industry.

With the inclusion of everything above, after learning all he could from the passersby on the street, Shouzou headed toward one of those places—

Goldas Adventurer's Guild, right along the main avenue. A magnificent five-story building with a doorway decorated with a prominent signboard overhead.

He passed through the entrance, then went straight to the counter and said, "I want to become an adventurer." In response, he was escorted through to a parlor in the back where they were going to go through the details with him.

The person who attended to him was a man in his mid-thirties with glistening, hardened black hair and a slightly cunning face.

"Um, Onigawara-san, is that correct? So it seems that you have a family name. May I ask where you come from?"

"Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan."

"Ja-pan.....? Where is Kana-gawa-pu-re-fec-shure? Ah, well, a pass was issued to you, so it shouldn't be an issue. Going by your appearance, I assume that you have some confidence in your strength. However, being an adventurer is to always live alongside danger. Even if you suffer an injury, our guild will not bear any responsibility. Is that fine with you?"

"Before that, I would appreciate an explanation of what the job would entail."

"Ahh, pardon me." The man slapped his forehead with a loud sound, then cackled as if something funny had happened.

What a terrible attitude this man had.

"Our guild has strong ties to the government of the kingdom, so a lot of large jobs from prominent trading firms come our way. As specific examples, take a look at these—" The man spread a stack of papers on the table.

After a quick glance, Shouzou's face grew more clouded by the second.

"Um, do you have any simple quests that can be finished within a day?" The quests that he was being shown were all clearly time-consuming ones, such as gathering enough beast fangs to fill five large bags, or gathering enough hellhound hides to fill an entire carriage.

When it came to the bodyguard jobs, they were all ones like guarding a count's daughter on her trip to marry into another noble's family, which meant staying at a city two weeks away.

Even the subjugation quests from the government were in the

form of participating in military campaigns and thus meant contract periods of several days at the least.

Shouzou did not want to be away from his family for an extended period of time. If possible, he would very much prefer a 9-to-5 job.

“Hahh?” The man laughed through his nose in ridicule.

“All the customers who come to us are bigshots. It is only by purchasing in bulk that necessary materials become cheap. The bodyguard quests are all from esteemed persons, so 24 hour constant attendance throughout the several weeks of the contracts is the most basic of requirements. Then, teamplay is needed for the magic beast subjugations. In the first place, someone like you who strolled into the city’s #1 adventurer’s guild all by your lonesome is clearly lacking common sense.”

“People cannot become an adventurer by themselves?”

“It’s not impossible. But it’s those pathetic people who go to the middle and small-sized guilds in search of trivial quests to fulfill. If it’s a job like ditch cleaning, then suuure you’d be able to work in the daytime and go home and rest all you like at night.”

At this point, Shouzou was willing to accept a ditch cleaning job if it was available, but he was really starting to take a dislike to this man’s tone.

(*Wait a second.....*) Adventurers accept quests through the services of an adventurer’s guild. And those quests are received from the government and trading firms. In other words, part of the process behind how a guild runs should involve drumming up business in the form of quests from those sources. In other words, sales.

Which naturally meant—

“Would your guild be interested in hiring me?”

“What?”

“Though it was a different industry, I am someone who has many years in sales under my belt. I have a huge wealth of experience and know-how. The duty of securing quests is one that I would be able to contribute greatly to.”

“And here I was, thinking what you were going to say.....” The man once again laughed through his nose.

“When a guild is as large as we are, customers come to us of their own accord, all right? This here is the adventurer’s guild founded by Marquis Goldas’s family. Sweating to gather quests like a bottom feeder guild is below us.”

“Hmm. In other words, a bottom feeder adventurer’s guild would have a sales department, is that what you are saying?”

“What?”

Shooting one last look at the dumbstruck man, Shouzou stood up. “Thank you for the valuable information.” Leaving him with those

words, Shouzou immediately left the adventurer's guild.

His target was set.

These foolish sloths sitting complacently at the top of the industry that have neglected to build up their foundation in sales.

He would be the one to let them know the importance of what they had been turning their nose down at! Fortunately, there was a huge number of adventurer's guilds in this city, ranging from medium to tiny, and even to bottom feeder. It was all thanks to the thriving adventurer industry.

From the information he gathered, Shouzou picked two of the places, then visited them. "This isn't going well....." To his chagrin, he was pretty much turned away at the door. Neither of them had anything like a sales department.

If it was a simple matter of him being turned down, then he could have come back another day with self-promoting materials in hand to convince them otherwise. But places with no drive for sales? Shouzou would rather turn them down himself.

It was almost 2 p.m.

War (job hunting) couldn't be waged on an empty stomach. He considered finding some place to sit where he could eat his wife's love-filled lunchbox while considering how to approach the next adventurer's guild.

However, Shouzou was feeling quite worried.

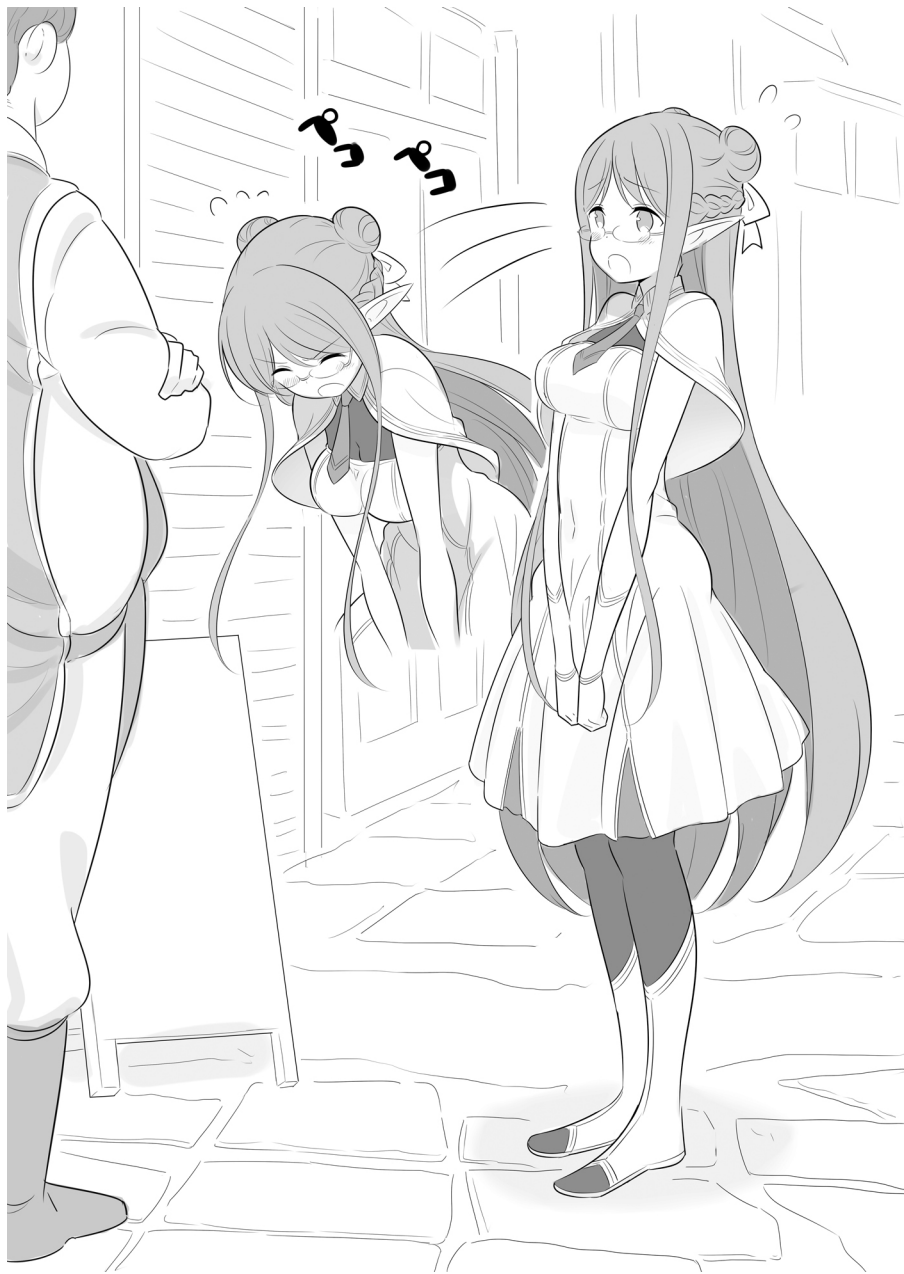
None of the more well-known adventurer's guilds seemed to have a sales department. The way the system worked was that quests would naturally go to guilds of corresponding sizes.

In other words, there was no demand for "sales."

(No, I'm sure the concept of "sales" should exist somewhere. For example, if it was a bottom feeder guild—) There was the possibility that they would have a person or two going around trying to drum up quests.

For example, yep, like that.

Just like that teenage girl before his eyes who was lowering her head again and again.....



“Please! We won’t mind even the smallest material gathering quests. Please consider registering with us—”

“You really are persistent, aren’t you. We give all our quests to Goldas, all right? And there’s no way a large shop like us would be handling materials in small amounts in the first place.”

“If you could only make an exception! Please! I’m begging you!” She was a really cute girl.

Her blue-tinged hair was tied up in braids that reached all the way to the backs of her knees. Every time her head went up and down, the round glasses on her nose slipped a little further, but she paid it no mind as she continued lowering her head repeatedly. Even from the side, he could see that she had a neat and trim face. That face was currently flushed red as she pled with desperation.

With another look, Shouzou noticed that her ears were long and tapered.

Could she be of the “elven” race that Emalia had told him about? (*But still, what a shoddy way of doing sales.....*) She was only repeating her request, showing no intention of laying out the all-important merits from the customer’s side and how the partnership would help the customer gain an edge. Though, well, in this case, the latter was probably non-existent.

However, her wholeheartedness left a very good impression on him.

“Goodness, you’ve really backed me into a corner here.....” The slightly chubby man that the girl was addressing scratched his head.

He had been touched by the girl’s passion..... except, that wasn’t what was happening.

Apparently he was just buying time to steal a longer look at the teenage girl’s chest. The look on his face was very blatantly lecherous.

Because the girl was wearing loose and comfortable clothes, every time her chest heaved, a certain jiggling phenomenon occurred.

Though they still fell short of his own wife’s, they were definitely more sizable than those of a certain timid freeloaded goddess.

Right when he was in the middle of thinking such reprehensible thoughts—

“Wh-What’s your business, huh?” The slightly chubby man looked at Shouzou and trembled.

“Tsk, you even brought something like this ... *thing* ... along to threaten me?”

“Eh? Uh, no, um.....” The teenage girl blinked and looked between Shouzou and the man in confusion.

“In any case! I have no intention of doing business with a bottom feeder guild like yours. Go away already!” The man hurried inside his

shop as if in escape.

“My apologies. I had no intention of getting in your way.....” Shouzou apologized to the clearly dejected girl.

“No, I’m sorry for blocking the way for normal passersby.” The girl gave him a courteous bow.

When she brought her head back up, she fixed her glasses, then made to trudge past Shouzou with heavy steps.

“Can I have a bit of your time, to talk?”

“Yes?”

“You are an employee of an adventurer’s guild, am I right? Are you the person in charge of sales?”

“Eh? Ah, yes I am. Or so I say, but I’m the only one in sales.” The girl managed a tired little laugh.

How astonishing.

The entire time up till then, this girl had not shown any sign of being afraid of him.

She was literally the first one ever, aside from his wife.

Shouzou found himself trembling, as what felt like electricity ran through his brain.

Before he could stop himself, words just tumbled out of his mouth.

“You have talent.”

“I’m sorry?” The teenage girl was taken back.

“As a salesperson, you have the necessary enthusiasm towards your job, the necessary passion to consider your client, and the necessary guts to persist regardless of how many times you are turned down. And above all else, the strength of heart to not fear me. You, young lady, possess all of those traits!”

“Y-Yes sir!” Due to the assertive tone that he had slipped into along the way, the girl was standing with her back straight as a rod.

“But unfortunately, you are sorely lacking in ‘technique.’ Are you perhaps under the mistaken impression that if you only lower your head enough, you would be able to sign a contract?”

“Y-Yes sir.....”

“And so, that brings us to the matter at hand.”

“Yes sir!”

The teenage girl’s blue eyes were almost blazing with intensity.

To which, Shouzou smiled gently and said, “Would your adventurer’s guild be interested in hiring me?”

“I’m sorry?”

No way was he was going to let this opportunity slip by. Though his desire to find a job was definitely there, he now found himself burning with the desire to nurture this girl with overflowing talent into a first-rate salesperson. That violent emotion propelled Shouzou as motivation.

But with perfect timing, exactly at that moment of enthusiasm,
Gurururururuuu.....

Shouzou's stomach growled—



After weaving through three or four back alleyways, Shouzou found himself standing in front of a wooden two story house. Nestled within the rows of stone-built houses, this place stood out from the rest in a bad way. Though he wouldn't go so far as to call it run-down, it clearly had seen its fair share of the seasons.

Elunheine Adventurer's Guild. That's what the signboard on display read.

The teenage elf girl that he had met on the main avenue had introduced herself as Sofie. At 15 years old, she really was quite young. Upon hearing Shouzou's request to be hired, she was rendered speechless for a short while, but after that, her eyes sparkled and she seemed extremely eager about it.

However, her delighted "Really?!" was quickly followed by "I can't make the decision by myself," and so he had to come back to her guild for an interview.

His stomach had asserted its existence in a rather noteworthy way just now, but Shouzou consciously held it in. At the moment, the interview was top priority. His conviction when heading into it was to save his wife's love-filled lunchbox for *after* his success.

They stepped through the entrance. "Come on in~ ♪ Welcome to Elunheine Adventurer's Gui—oh, it's Sofie. Welcome back~ Whoa, what's with the giant?!" And immediately found themselves greeted by a very boisterous welcome.

Just when he thought he was being greeted by a business smile, he saw it slipping into disappointment upon realizing that it was Sofie and not a customer. But then Shouzou appeared immediately afterward, and that certainly astonished her to no end.

(Is this little kid also a demihuman?) A counter stood in the middle of the room. Sitting on the other side of it was a boisterous little girl.

Her short brown hair strongly reminded him of Kana, his second daughter.

But on her head were a pair of cat-like ears that were standing up straight, and behind her back was a thin and long cat-like tail that was waving around.

The little girl that Shouzou was following with his eyes in a daze abruptly came to a start with the murmur, "Oh, he's a customer!"

"Come on in~ ♪ Welcome to Elunheine Adventurer's Guild ♪ Well that's a new face, are you here to register? If it's quests that you are looking for, unfortunately we don't have anything violent that Uncle

Giant would be interested in~ Sowwie♪” She flashed her business smile again. Then she also winked and stuck out her tongue.

Her tone sounded like she was just messing around, so it prompted Sofie to chastise her in a fluster.

“Moko-san, that was rude!”

“Is that so, nyaa~? Rather than being all strict and uptight, I thought that a bit of friendliness might be better in helping to build a closer relationship with the customer. At least, that’s what I thought of by myself.”

“But even so—”

“Mm, not bad.”

“Eh?” “Nn?” Shouzou interrupted Sofie as he began expressing his honest opinion.

She really was just messing around. In regards to the proper attitude to take toward a first-time customer, that was definitely a failing grade. That was why it was actually “bad.”

But that said, “Thinking for yourself and putting it into action is worthy of commendation. The direction that you are aiming for is also not wrong. However, you should have first consulted your superior or colleagues. Even if your proposal was turned down, you would have still learned something from it, which I believe you would have been able to absorb as a step towards your own betterment.”

They had frozen up. Both Sofie and the little girl called Moko had their mouths hanging open.

“Oh, pardon me. I’m sorry for suddenly sounding like I was giving you a lecture. Sofie-san, please guide me to where I need to go.”

“Ah, oh right. It’s this way.” Shouzou followed after Sofie.

Apparently the entirety of the first floor was designated as a business area. The impression it gave off was similar to that of teller booths in a bank or post office. The center of the room was partitioned off by the counter, which prominently bisected the room into two. The side of the entrance, due to the conspicuous absence of people, felt decidedly empty, and the long benches lined up against the wall felt like a token effort in protest.

The other side of the counter was apparently the office area. There were four tables, three of which were placed like a row of three islands, and the entire room was surrounded by bookshelves. At the side was a small set for receiving visitors.

Of the twelve available seats, only one was currently occupied. The person occupying the seat was most likely a girl, going by appearances. Position-wise, it seemed like she would be the person in charge of the officework, but both her hands were hanging limply at her side, her back was bent, and her long, black hair was covering her face like a veil. But based on the gloomy-sounding muttering that

could be heard from her direction, Shouzou gathered that she was not actually asleep.

There was almost nothing on top of the tables. Only in a single area were there documents scattered all about.

“Gosh, Moko-san, you’ve gone and left papers all over again. And so soon after I cleaned up this morning.”

“*Nyaha*, I just had a little something I was looking up.” Moko laughed somewhat mischievously, which caused Sofie to sigh and drop her shoulders. Her small pair of glasses slipped out of place.

At the far end of the office area was a single table positioned in a way that gave it a view of the entire place.

A well-rounded, middle-aged woman was seated at that table. Or more like, she was sleeping at that table. The back of her head was resting on the back of her chair, her face was directed towards the ceiling, and she was even snoring a bit. Sofie went to the side of the counter, pushed open the part that was a door, then went inside. It was a bit narrow, but barely just wide enough for Shouzou to somehow step through while facing straight forward.

“Auntie. Auntie Adora, please wake up. We have a visitor.”

“*Fuga?!?*” The middle-aged woman—Adora—was being shaken by Sofie, which caused her to wake up with her head rolling.

“Call me Guildmaster! *Funya fuga munyu munya.....*” She shouted loudly, but then went back to rubbing her eyes sleepily. Apparently she was still only half awake.

“Ugh, seriously..... GUILDMASTER, A VISITOR!”

“?! WELCOME TO ELUNHEINE ADVENTURER’S GUILD!” Sofie’s shout was so close to Adora’s face that she leapt to her feet, knocking over her chair in the process.

She turned out to be a large woman with a build that almost rivaled that of Shouzou’s own. She had hair with a bluish tinge in a short bob style. Long, tapered ears. She was clearly also an elf, same as Sofie.

“Who are you? Reception is on the other side of the counter.” Upon noticing Shouzou, Adora’s eyes glinted sharply in intimidation. The large majority of people who are not frightened by their first sight of Shouzou react this way.

“Auntie, that’s not it. This person is—” Sofie explained everything in a fluster.

“You want to be employed here? What an eccentric person you are.” Adora had done a 180 and was now laughing heartily. She invited Shouzou towards the table closest to the reception set to continue the conversation.

Shouzou was about to follow her, but—

(*Nn? That admin girl.....*) She wasn’t moving, merely sitting there

and muttering to herself nonstop. But behind her back, something could be seen wriggling around.

It was the tip of what looked like a reptilian tail.

(Is she also a demihuman?) It's rude to stare at a woman for so long. But the reception set just happened to be exactly behind her. So the moment Shouzou passed by her, he quickly shot a sideways glance for confirmation. From the waist down, she was a snake.

Peeking out below her short skirt was a long tail covered with scales. That was the characteristic of the Naga race. The snake people, to put it bluntly.

Two elves, one beastkin, and one of the Naga race.

They sure weren't lacking in variety around here. After sitting down on the worn out sofa made of cloth, Shouzou opened his attaché case for the first time today.

He then held out his résumé to Adora, who had taken a seat across from him. The sheet had been printed out from his printer at home.

"Wah, such high quality paper!" Sofie, who had come over bearing cups of tea, exclaimed in surprise.

Adora narrowed her eyes as she scanned the page.

"Lemme see. Shouzou, Onigawara. So you have a family name. Now that I've taken a better look, your clothes also look quite high quality. Look at how smooth and glossy they are. Then this paper too. Who are you really?"

"Just your average citizen."

Adora shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, I don't really mind, even if you are a noble hiding your identity and out for some fun. But thing is, I don't understand a single thing of what is written on here." Adora waved the flimsy sheet of paper carelessly.

The résumé was indeed written in Japanese, but thanks to the magic cast by the Grade 1 goddess that was his wife, there should have been no issue at all with its legibility.

Thus, the reasonable deduction to make would be that it was the concepts foreign to this world, such as "IT Firm" and "information systems" that she didn't understand.

"The company where I was previously employed at was a place that focused on providing easy-to-work-in environments for our customers. And I myself was involved in the sales department, whose purpose was to bring in new customers to the company. Though the industry may have been different, I firmly believe that the skills and experience that I amassed at my previous job would be highly effective at your adventurer's guild."

"Well you're a serious one aintcha....." Adora stared closely at

Shouzou, even taking the time to peer at him from various angles.

“But are you sure about this? If you work at an adventurer’s guild, then you won’t be able to become an adventurer. You know that, right?”

“I’m sorry, what do you mean by that?”

“An adventurer’s guild is a place where people who need help with something bring us those tasks as quests, and then adventurers come to pick up and resolve those quests. In other words, it’s an intermediary business. And it is from the adventurers’ completion reward that we retain a tiny portion as commission. That’s how we earn our income.”

Shouzou nodded, having already expected it to be so.

“But if the quest isn’t completed, then not even a single bronze coin comes into our pockets. And when capable adventurers stop coming, the place gradually earns a negative reputation, which eventually causes quests to also stop coming. Well then, that’d be a problem, wouldn’t it. So, if there are no adventurers to complete quests, how can this negative spiral be avoided?”

“.....The employees of the Guild should go out and complete the quests themselves.”

“Bingo. But if that happens, then the Guild is no longer an intermediary business.”

“I am not familiar with the ethics system of this city, but isn’t completion of the quests the very top priority?”

“Oh, that’s a great way of putting it. It’s true that back then, as long as the quests got resolved, then no one said anything. But two years ago, there was a bunch of people who brought out that ‘ethics system’ that you mentioned. They claimed that ‘That goes against the spirit of what an adventurer’s guild is’ or some nonsense like that.” Thus new rules were adopted, and employees of adventurer’s guilds could no longer be adventurers themselves.

“Who was it that went and did that?”

“The biggest names in the industry.” Shouzou tilted his head in puzzlement.

If it’s a big company, then it should have the resources to set up a specialized department to take care of uncompleted quests. With that, they would be able to get even further ahead of the middle and small guilds, until eventually reaching oligopoly status.

“Wait, no..... I see.....” If adventurer’s guilds were capable of completing quests on their own.....

“Skilled adventurers got together to found their own guilds, is that what was happening?” If this was the case, then all the large, and therefore expensive, quests would go to those guilds instead.

It was something that could have flipped the entire industry on its

head.

“Bingo again! Well look at you, you’re a sharp one eh?” While observing Adora, who seemed to be rather excessively enjoying this talk, another possibility came to Shouzou’s mind.

“I see. This Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild was also one such guild founded by a skilled adventurer. Am I correct?”

Adora’s smile disappeared off her face. Sofie audibly took a sharp intake of breath.

“But then that doesn’t add up.” Shouzou’s curiosity caused him to continue voicing his thought process out loud.

“If the regulations got changed, and you were no longer capable of completing quests on your own anymore, then you didn’t have to continue running this intermediary business that you were unfamiliar with. If your founder was an adventurer, then he could have just folded up the Guild, then simply returned to being an adventurer. Even if there was a restricted period of time that employees could not re-register as an adventurer after quitting, surely the regulations aren’t as irrational to implement a lifelong ban, right?”

“You really are a sharp man. Yes you’re right, it’s not a lifelong ban. The restriction is only 2 years. During that time, you wouldn’t be particularly left without means of sustenance, as you could go help out at a farm or be a porter or do any number of things.”

“In that case, why then?” Shouzou gazed at Adora steadily, as if to peer into the depths of her heart. “Why is it that even now, you are still trying to keep this adventurer’s guild running?”

From the way she talked, he could not feel even a scrap of passion toward the running of the guild.

But despite that being the case, and even though she still held the authority to decide everything regarding the guild, why was it that she had still yet to close it up? He shot a quick glance beside Adora.

Sofie was looking down with a pained face.

The two of them were both elves. Both their hair color and nature also seemed remarkably similar. And if he added the fact that Sofie had called Adora “Auntie” earlier, then in all likelihood, their relationship was—

Despite having half deduced the answer, Shouzou still waited for Adora to slowly open her mouth.

“Seriously..... to ask that even though you already seem to have deduced the answer, what a bully you are. That’s right, this guild was not founded by me. It is something that was entrusted to me.”

Shouzou thought, “As expected.” He looked at Sofie once again, then returned his gaze to Adora.

“Yep, this place was founded by my younger brother. Who also happened to have been Sofie’s father. Despite being an elf, he had

incredible talent with the sword. He was a mere step away from reaching Platinum rank. His wife's skill with the bow was also beyond that of any normal person. And almost no one could match them when it came to material gathering and magic beast subjugation. But two years ago, a rampant epidemic claimed both their lives. The regulations came shortly after that. Those who had gathered to the guild due to their respect for my younger brother and his wife left one by one, and in that way Elunheine Adventurer's Guild was reduced to being a bottom feeder guild in the blink of an eye."

Adora shrugged her shoulders, then continued speaking as if beating herself up.

"The only ones who stayed are, as you can see, incompetent ones who can't even earn a damn thing." She finished up by raising both hands in a gesture of resignation.

Silence descended upon the room.

Moko the receptionist could only laugh dryly in a faint show of protest.

The black-haired girl abruptly stopped muttering.

Sofie clenched her skirt so hard her knuckles turned white.

Adora turned her back towards Sofie and looked up at the ceiling.

A receptionist who only knows how to throw her smile around.

An admin staff who only stays in her seat and mutters to herself.

A sales staff with a fatal lack of technique.

And above all, a thoroughly unmotivated superior.

How hard Lady Fate must have worked to leave all these talents in this place.

Shouzou could no longer suppress the emotions welling up from deep within him.

"AH~HA~HA~HA~HA~!!" Sofie blinked behind her round glasses, and Adora nearly fell off her chair. "Incompetent"? Did I just hear you call them 'incompetent,' Adora-san?" Shouzou slapped his knee loudly. The air vibrated with tension.

"You really shouldn't say words that you don't mean." His eyes swiveled to fix onto the girl looking over blankly from reception.

"Moko-san, correct? Your attitude of having a readily available smile for any customer who might be walking through the door at any moment is truly worthy of commendation. The way you chose to do it might need quite a bit of work, but the thought of making adventurers that you had never met before enjoy themselves definitely got across to me." In all the other adventurer's guilds that Shouzou had visited, receptionists greeted adventurers with emotionless faces, and handled all their interactions in a strictly business-like manner.

What adventurer would feel motivated when treated that way? If Shouzou himself was an adventurer, then the concept of completing a

quest in order to share the joy of success with the guild as a business partner would never even cross his mind.

“At the very least, I found myself healed by your smile.” Moko was listening intently with a stiff body, but the compliments caused her to smile bashfully with happiness.

Shouzou stood up, and shifted his gaze. This time, he fixed his gaze on the girl that had remained still up to now, with her back still turned toward him.

“Next..... you, the black-haired girl over there.” Her long snake tail quivered.

“If I heard it correctly, what you’ve been muttering the entire time were details of past quests, right? Without looking at anything, relying solely on your memory, repeating them over and over again. In addition to that, you were also vocalizing the characteristics of the adventurers who had completed each quest, their state when reporting their completion, analysis of all these details, and even the issues and areas for improvement that you saw.”

Thanks to the power that he had gained from his wife, a Grade 1 goddess, Shouzou could even hear the sound of a needle dropping several kilometers away if he wanted to.

“I couldn’t understand a lot of it due to my lack of relevant knowledge, but to me, your analysis sounded very precise and persuasive. An adventurer’s guild is an intermediary business. The way I see it, selecting the most appropriate adventurer to complete each quest, and providing helpful advice to them is also part of the service to be provided. When your astonishing memory is added to the picture, all I feel from you is unmatched potential for being someone in charge of administration.”

“Ah...uuu.....” The black-haired girl tucked in her chin as if in embarrassment.

Shouzou’s next target was Sofie, who was standing still in dumbfounded astonishment.

“As for you, there is nothing new that I need to say. Your talent as a salesperson is head and shoulders above anyone else. The overflowing passion that you possess will surely help you to master the technique that you so desperately lack in but the blink of an eye.” Then Shouzou added a few more words in a gentle tone.

“I fully understand your feelings of wanting to protect the adventurer’s guild that your parents built up. That is good motivation, I won’t deny that. However, your life is yours alone. I want you to take some time to properly think about what it is that would allow you to properly enjoy your life. Even if at the end, you arrive at the conclusion that protecting the guild is something that you really want to do, it would become something that you had decided on with your

own will. Surely that would enable you to adopt a forward-looking attitude markedly different from before.”

“I... I see..... thank you!” Tears welled in Sofie’s eyes as she replied stoutly. After seeing that and nodding firmly, Shouzou finally returned his gaze to Adora.

She sat up straight and looked up at Shouzou almost defiantly.

“Thing is, there are many different kinds of managers and leaders. There is the domineering type, who makes all decisions with the snap of a finger and leads the way by standing in front. There is the cooperative type, who prioritizes maintaining harmony with everyone and generates great power by sweeping everyone along. There really is a lot. So then, which type would you say you are?”

“Ha, lemme see..... is there a type that is entirely unmotivated and doesn’t want to do anything?”

“If you become that kind of manager, then the future is truly hopeless.”

“So I would imagine.”

“There’s no doubt that you are unmotivated. The negative emotions that gild your words and actions do not seem to be mere acting. However, you are definitely not the kind of manager who is entirely unmotivated. If you ask me why I say that, then—” Shouzou widened his eyes, then declared firmly.

“In defiance of this state that can almost be said to be rock bottom, you have continued protecting this Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild for two whole years!”

“—!”

“You are the kind of manager that specializes in ‘protecting.’ That type always makes sure that they protect what it is that they have to protect, no matter what happens, using whatever they have at their disposal. That especially includes your staff.” It wasn’t only Adora who took a sharp breath. All three of the other staff did as well.

“As soon as you give the order, this guild could be disbanded, yet you haven’t done that. The truth is, you have desperately trying to keep the guild afloat this entire time while waiting for the day when you are the only one left, when all these girls have managed to stand on their own and have found new paths to follow, am I right? The reason why you’ve been prodding them by calling them things like ‘incompetent’ is likely your way of galvanizing them into becoming independent by casting yourself as the bad guy. Though your way of going about it is a bit clumsy, I have to say.”

“I wasn’t actually thinking of anything that grand.....”

“I disagree! Everyone has something sparkling hidden within themselves. It is without a shred of doubt that I declare that you possess undeniable talent as a manager.”

Shouzou thought back to his past.

A bottom feeder IT firm. A place that yielded no results regardless of how hard he worked, a place where everyone was tired to their bones, a place where he, and everyone else, lived every day in fear of the company being shut down.

But he continued to struggle in those deplorable circumstances, he and his superiors and his colleagues and his juniors.

But then he realized that within every single one of them lay a precious gem that could shine brightly with just a little bit of polishing.

What brought him to that realization was a single woman.

It was that goddess who he had met that summer night, drenched in rain.

After meeting her, Shouzou changed completely.

He became overflowing with so much energy that even he was astonished by it, which gave him the leisure to take a good look at himself.

That lifted the curtains on Shouzou's Great Leap Forward.

He shot to the top of the company's sales department, and had never yielded the spot to anyone else since. His superiors, colleagues, subordinates, and even those in management—everyone who came into contact with him changed.

The company grew rapidly. Within the span of a decade, it rose to become the top in the entire industry. They expanded through M&A, spread to the entire country, then even advanced into the global market. Charging forward with the momentum of surging waves and raging billows, right now they had consolidated their position within the forefront of the entire industry in the global scene.

"I was but the catalyst. The reason why you changed was because you yourself realized your own potential."

He didn't remember exactly when it was that the goddess had said that to him.

It was not false modesty. And neither would he allow himself to become overconfident because of that.

But if a goddess said so, then there was no room for doubt, and no other way but to simply accept it as the plain truth.

Even if he hadn't met her, perhaps there would have been a different stimulus that would have triggered the same change in his life.

And that is why—

(I want to be the "Silvia" in other people's lives. In my own daughters' lives, and also in the lives of these people that I normally would never have met!)

Bam!

Shouzou slammed the table with both of his hands. He did make sure to hold back so he wouldn't break it.

"Please hire me for this place." He lowered his head almost in a dogeza.

"Due to certain reasons, I can only be in this city for about a year. That is why it will only be for a limited amount of time. But this I promise you: If you hire me, then within this one year—" Shouzou's head shot up, and swiveled around to look at each of the four people in turn. "I will make this Elunheine Adventurer's Guild the top guild in this entire city!"

Silence reigned over the room for a few seconds.

"Ha, HAHAAHAHA! That's one bold claim for sure! You mean to surpass even Goldas with their exorbitant amount of capital? Furthermore, within a mere year?"

"It is entirely possible."

"With a mere 4..... 5 people?"

"That's how the start always is. However, more will join us eventually." Shouzou's straightforward and unblinking gaze eventually caused Adora to shake her head in resignation.

"Here I was thinking that you were just a stick in the mud. But what a crook you've turned out to be." But after saying that, Adora smiled broadly. "I like it. I like it very much. It's interesting! Let me see you give it a try then."

"Which means—"

"Yep, you're hired. We'd always appreciate an extra pair of guy hands around here. But your salary will be based on commission, all right? If you can't earn anything and end up dying by the roadside, it won't be any of my business. But if you want, we have an empty room upstairs though. You want it?" Despite her abusive language, the fact that she even considered offering a place to stay for this middle-aged man confirmed Shouzou's image of her as a manager specialized in protecting.

"Thanks, but I have a house outside the city. I will be commuting from there everyday."

"Haah? Outside the walls? You get stranger and stranger by the moment."

"Well, at any rate, I'll be in your care then, President."

"Hah? 'President?'" Question marks appeared above not only Adora's head, but also that of all the other employees.

"In my home country, that's what we called those in charge at the very top. I can stop if you don't like it, but I personally don't think I'll ever get used to the title 'Guildmaster.'"

"Well, call me whatever you like." Shouzou and Adora exchanged a firm handshake.

And thus, Shouzou's job hunting in another world ended with him finding a place of employment in the first day.

With this, he could freely—

“Sorry, but I missed lunch just now. I'll be eating it here then.”

From his attaché case, Shouzou took out the love-filled lunchbox from his wife.

The current time was slightly after 3 p.m. It had already become snack time—

Side Story 1: The Three Sisters

Playing Together

It was the first time since coming over to this other world that their father, Shouzou, was absent.

Right after his departure, the entire family, plus one freeloader, gathered in the living room. It was just a moment to sit together before the start of the children's studying.

Cheerful music from a public broadcast of a children's program could be heard coming from the TV. The youngest daughter, Hina, was swirling her silver hair around and around while dancing along with the lady on the TV program. Incidentally, the TV could not pick up the usual broadcasting signals, so the family had signed a contract with an online program broadcasting service and thus now had TV to watch again.

Amidst the relaxed atmosphere, the middle daughter, Kana, suddenly pumped both hands into the air and jumped up and shouted.

"I wanna go on an adventure!" Hina abruptly stopped moving, then turned to look at Kana with sparkling eyes. Everyone's attention gathered onto her.

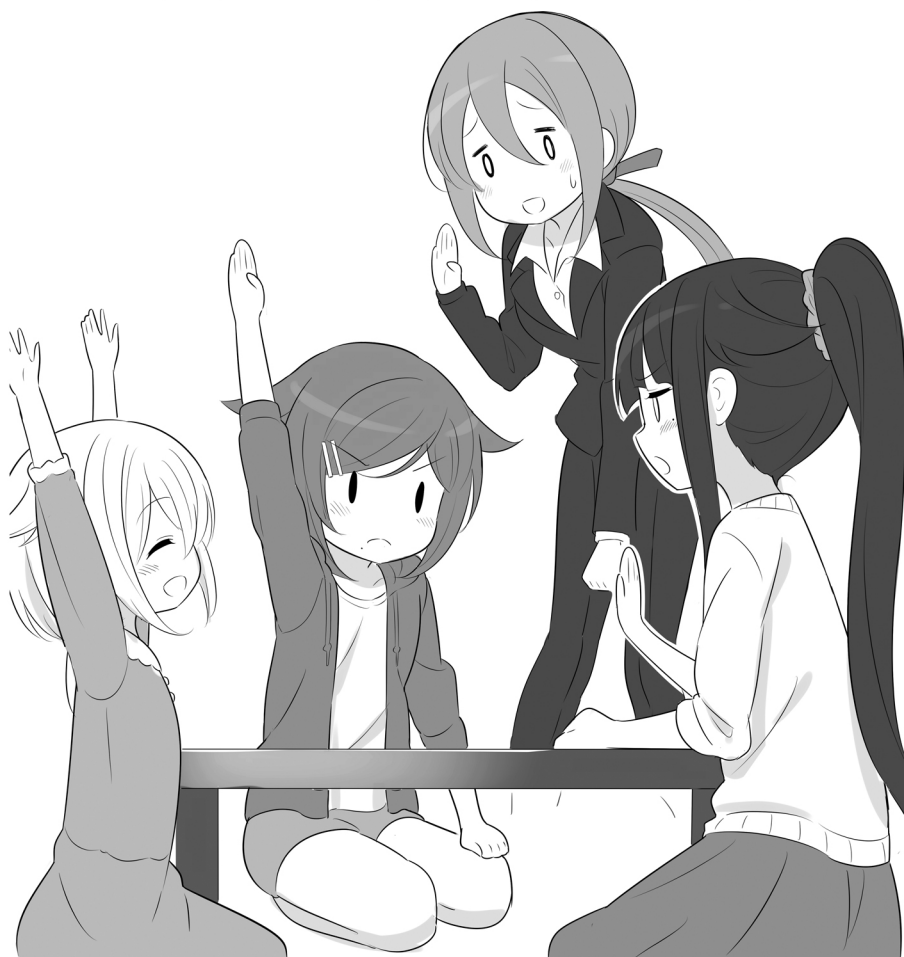
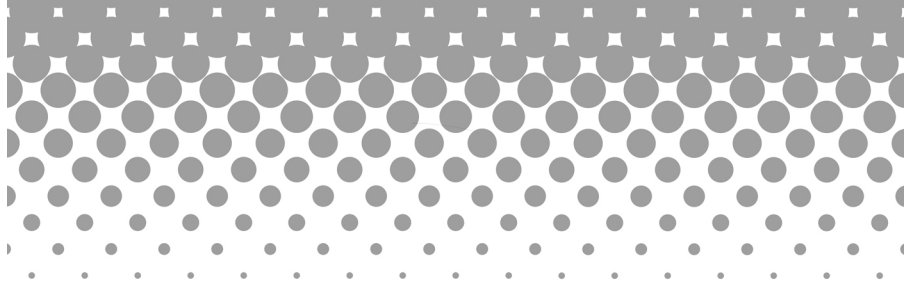
"If we stay cooped up in the house every day, then our bodies are going to grow dull. And that is why I wanna go on an adventure!" She thrust her right fist into the air to demonstrate her overflowing enthusiasm.

The eldest daughter, Yuna, raised her hand before replying.

"Dad isn't around right now, though. Wouldn't it be dangerous?"

"Before that, you two have studying to do today....." The freeloading goddess who was supposed to do the teaching—Emalia—also rose her hand before mumbling her protest.

Immediately after that, Hina energetically raised her hand while going "Me me me!"



In the Onigawara household, there was a custom of raising one's hand before speaking. It was because, otherwise, things would get out of hand if all three daughters talked over each other at the same time.

"Yes, Hinacchi?"

"Hina-sama also wants to play outside~! The reason is because Hina-sama wants to practice running~!" In the Onigawara household, there was also a custom of accompanying one's statements with a reason. This was also established because otherwise, if everyone merely said whatever came to mind, then things might also get out of hand.

"Ahh, you want to 'play outside,' huh..... And I even went to the trouble of using the word 'adventure' as a more roundabout way of putting it too....."

"In other words, Kana, you just want to play as well, right?" asked Yuna with accusing eyes.

"If you want to put it *that* bluntly, then, yep. More like, with Mama around, I don't think we really have to worry about safety and whatnot. Since she's a goddess and all. Since she can use magic and all."

"Mmm, but Mommy has housework to do....." Silvia said with a troubled expression.

"Which leaves us with—" Kana glanced toward Emalia with a mischievous grin.

"Unlike the Madam, there are certain circumstances that prevent me from using magic so freely....."

"Uh, not that. I was thinking of having Emalia-sensei do the chores."

"I cannot allow that." Silvia was firm in her refusal.

"Chores in the Onigawara household are my territory. I wouldn't yield them to anyone, not even to Mother-in-Law. Though I would very much appreciate it if Yuna and Kana wanted to help out a bit more."

"Oh, ughh. That turned out to be a windfall....."

"A 'windfall'? Are you sure you didn't mean a 'hornet's nest'? It seems you really do need to do some studying." While clutching her head in remorse, Kana was subjected to words filled with "kindness" from Silvia.

"Mommy will finish up with the laundry and cleaning quickly, so later after Hina-chan's nap, let's all go outside to play for a while."

"I love you, Mama!"

"But in exchange, the two of you are to finish your studies for the day by then. Do we have a deal?" Silvia was not one to forget to hammer home one final warning.

And then, afternoon rolled around, and after having their 3 p.m. snacks—

“A race~!”

“Oh, Hinacchi, you sure are fired up. But your big sister isn’t going to take it easy on you, all right?”

“Come at me with all you have~” Kana and Hina’s eyes clashed in a shower of sparks.

Outside of the premises. The place that was previously bare dirt had, thanks to Silvia’s magic, been tamed and turned into a playing field. The sight caused Emalia to become teary-eyed, but there was no way that Silvia was going to risk having her precious daughters trip on the rugged bare earth and get hurt in any way.

At a position roughly 20 meters behind Hina, Kana took a crouching start stance.

The goal was roughly 20 meters in front of Hina. Despite this being a handicapped match, their eyes were dead serious.

“I’m starting the count. Ready, set..... start!” Although Hina herself was the one who had shouted the countdown, she was a bit late in running off with her slightly unsteady steps.

“Uoryahhh!” Kana barreled down the track at full speed.

The distance between the two of them closed in the blink of an eye. However, Kana abruptly froze when she reached a position right behind Hina. She froze in a running stance, no less.

Hina continued running without noticing at all. Eventually, she neared the goal, at which point Kana resumed her barreling.

“Uoryahhh!” The two of them crossed the goal. But not together. Kana had been slightly ahead.

“Gasp Oops!” She turned around in a fluster to find the figure of a kindergarten kid holding back her tears.

“Wait, no, this is.....” As she flailed around trying to think up words of consolation, Hina looked up at her with sharp eyes.

“Humans—”

“Nn?”

“Grow off of defeat all by themselves~”

“All by themselves?”

“All by themselves.”

“I see..... Yep, I guess humans do grow all by themselves.” The sisters nodded at each other. Then they exchanged a firm handshake.

“All right, then let me show you the valiant figure of a younger sister who’s grown all by herself to surpass an older sister.” Yuna, who had been watching her younger siblings’ exchange with a half-amused and half-exasperated face, suddenly became subjected to a mischievous smile from Kana.

“I’m not doing it.”

“I think Yuna-nee should exercise a bit more.”

“I-I’m fine, really.....”

“That’s why you get called the ‘Imperfect Honor Student.’”

“You’re the only one who calls me that!”

“Hmph. In short, you’re just scared, right? Scared of the existence of a younger sister who can surpass you.”

“Ugh..... all right, that’s it. If you’re going to put it that way, then I’ll show you the true strength of an older sister!”

While looking at their crimson-faced older sister, both younger sisters thought the same thing.

(Yuna-nee’s really so cute how she falls for things so quickly whenever she gets provoked.)

(So cute~)

Thus it became a handicapped match in favor of the older sister with a starting advantage of 5 meters.

“Uhh, well, Yuna-nee tried really hard. Yep.”

“Oh, shut up.....” After dashing at top speed for the full 40 meters, Yuna found herself unable to move a single muscle for quite a while afterward.

Chapter 4: The First Sale and Its Outcome

First day at work. At exactly 8:45 in the morning, Shouzou “left for work.”

In this city, adventurer’s guilds were open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. The time before and after the opening hours were for preparation and other admin work.

His seat was all the way in the back, on the left side when approaching the counter from the entrance.

It was chosen so that he would be as far away from the customers and be as inconspicuous as possible. Though in the first place, as someone in sales, Shouzou intended to be out most of the time during opening hours anyways.

Before doing anything else, Shouzou first sat down to read through all the materials they had in regards to the laws that applied to adventurer’s guilds. The way he saw it, becoming familiar with the rules that set the boundaries within the industry was an essential first step. But after reaching the last page, he found himself dogged by a baffling question.

(That’s strange. I can’t find it written anywhere though?) A certain rule that he thought would be present was nowhere to be found, even after he scanned through the materials a second time.

The reason why quests became concentrated at large scale guilds.

The reason why none of the quests got around to bottom feeder guilds.

Based on what Adora had said the other day, the general idea was that “quests don’t go to places that people don’t trust.” But after going home and ruminating on it, Shouzou came to doubt whether that was the only thing going on.

Thus he scrupulously searched through the materials in expectation of something that would provide a more rational explanation..... but it was nowhere to be found. There wasn’t even anything close to describing what he was looking for.

With the question, “*Why, then?*” looping around in his mind, he then turned his eyes toward the ledger to gain a grasp on the financial status of the guild.

(What... is this?) He found baffling entries that seemed out of place.

(*Could it be.....*) Suddenly realizing what could possibly be the answer to the question that he had been struggling with up till then, Shouzou turned towards Adora.

“President, may I ask you something?” As always, she was sitting slumped in her chair and nodding off. Upon being called out to, Adora looked up sluggishly.

“Sofie, all yours.....” She splayed herself over her desk even while managing that reply.

“Oh, Auntie..... We’ve been open for quite a while already, please sit up and look sharp.” From his seat, which was located behind Sofie’s, Shouzou could see that she was pouting slightly.

“Sofie, let’s cut her a little slack, shall we? After all the hard work she puts in at night, I’m sure that the President is really tired right now.”

“How on earth did you—?!” All the blood drained from Adora’s face as she leapt up in alarm.

“I am looking through the ledger right now. No matter how you read it, this guild isn’t earning enough to keep four people fed. More like, your finances are entirely in the red. Which logically means that someone is doing something that’s helping to keep the coffers filled just enough. During the daytime, everyone is working here, but there’s just one person obviously very sleepy—”

“AAAH! Enough, that’s enough already! What is *with* you, sheesh. Your perception is too sharp, all right? Sheesh, that sort of thing is supposed to be left unsaid, all right?”

“I think you’re the only person who thought it was being kept a secret.”

“Eh?” Adora quickly panned around the room. Moko-san shot over a mischievous smile from her spot at reception.

“All of you guys, you knew.....?”

“Of course they did. There’s no way that the crew of a ship wouldn’t notice the efforts of the ship captain who’s desperately trying to keep the ship afloat. It appears that President was so focused on protecting you all that she didn’t realize she was being considered as someone to be protected in turn—”

“That’s enough, I get it already! How do you manage to always throw me off balance, seriously.....”

“And so, back to my question.”

“I handed that off to Sofie already.” Adora planted her beet red face onto the table as if to conceal it.

Having been nominated by name, Sofie turned to ask Shouzou, “Yes, what is it?” with a wry smile still on her face.

“According to the rules that apply to adventurer’s guilds, ‘Upon completion of a quest, the quest giver is to pay an amount of several

percent to several tens of percent to the adventurer's guild, depending on the total reward amount.' In other words, that would be our commission. But in the ledger, I see an item separately labeled as 'Deposit.' What is that?"

"The deposit is a certain amount that adventurers are to pay the Guild in advance when they accept a quest. Even if the quest is not completed, we get to keep that amount as our income. If the quest is successfully completed, then the quest giver pays the guild the reward amount minus the deposit. This is done in order to protect the guilds."

"Protect?" Something was tugging at Shouzou's attention. However, he first asked a separate question.

"However, the word 'Deposit' is nowhere to be found in the rules. Didn't the President also say yesterday that 'if the reward isn't completed, then not even a single bronze coin comes into our pockets'?" The person who answered his question was Adora, who still had her face planted onto the desk.

"That was just a figure of speech. That was hardly the time to go into such details." Sofie elaborated. "There are several things that are not in the rules, but that the guilds decided among themselves or do as common practice. They sometimes get changed due to the times, which is why they were never actually put into writing."

So, commercial practice, basically. But if that was the case—*(The only parties who benefit from the practice of deposits are the large places..... I see, so that's why quests don't go to bottom feeder guilds.)* The question that he had been puzzling over from the start, its answer had finally become clear.

Shouzou had been under the impression that "Each quest can only be registered at a single adventurer's guild."

And that that was the reason why quests only went to the large guilds.

But there was nothing like it stipulated anywhere in the rules.

Which meant that "registering one quest with multiple adventurer's guilds" was not forbidden.

In that case, then it wouldn't have been strange to see quests that can be repeated without issue—such as gathering quests for materials that are in constant demand—being thrown at every single guild in the city. In such a situation, it would be really strange to see not even a single one of those quests here at this guild.

But once the deposit—which is effectively a burden on the quest giver—enters the equation, then everything changes.

This was the true form of the fetters that had prevented quest givers from registering quests with guilds that they did not trust.

"Could it be that there is also a cancellation fee when a quest giver wants to cancel a quest?"

“Yes there is. This is also one of those things that isn’t in the rules, but that all the guilds do.” It seemed that Sofie saw both of them as “good practices that ensured a minimum amount of income for bottom feeder guilds.”

(I could just correct the misunderstanding here, but.....) Experience is always better than mere knowledge. If she is to learn something, having her experience it firsthand would be far more effective. So Shouzou stood up, declaring, “I’m heading out now. Sofie-san, I’d like for you to come along with me.”

“We’ll be doing sales?!”

“Indeed. We’ll be making our greetings and also doing some work at the same time.”

“Understood!” Sofie was full of enthusiasm.

Shouzou returned a nod, then—

“Furthermore—”

He also called out to the solitary girl who’d been sitting by herself a distance away and muttering to herself the entire time.

“Lalaine-san, we’ll need you too.”

“.....?!” Her muttering stopped abruptly. Then, after being petrified for a few moments, the face of the young Naga girl shot up, and began shaking left to right with incredible vigor. And it kept on shaking.

Her long, black hair flew horizontally to reveal intermittent glimpses of a face that was so pale that it looked almost sickly.

It was Shouzou’s first time seeing her face, but he found it rather cute and shapely.

“Umm, Onigawara-san. Lalaine-san is extremely shy of strangers, so going outside is a bit.....”

“That seems the case indeed, but I really must insist. I won’t ask her to do anything unreasonable like talking to someone. She just has to follow along behind us and mutter whatever comes to mind. Just as she always does.” Lalaine’s movement stopped abruptly.

“If... if that, is all, then.....” Her voice was as soft as a whisper, but Shouzou caught it perfectly.

“Thank you very much. Well then, let’s make haste. Avoiding noontime would be in our best interests.” As Shouzou went to grab his attaché case, Sofie bustled about readying things while asking, “Where will we be going? There were places that I didn’t manage to go to yesterday—” Her eyes were practically sparkling behind her round eyeglasses.

“The store where I met you yesterday.” Shouzou replied.

“Eh?”

“I’m thinking of signing one or two large contracts with that place. Today.”

Sofie repeated Shouzou's words to herself as if to process them, then, ".....EHHHHH?!" A cry of astonishment projected out from the very depths of her diaphragm.



They reached their destination later than originally expected.

The reason was because Lalaine could only move at a very slow pace. Having shut herself up indoors for as long as she had, a mere twenty minutes of walking proved enough to already render her unsteady on her feet. Though, well, in her case, rather than "feet," her bottom half (specifically, everything beneath her thighs) was that of a snake. So rather than "walking," it would be more accurate to say that she progressed by slithering and wriggling onward.

After resting for about 2 minutes, Shouzou and company entered the store. This material store was one of the highest ranked in the city.

The name of the store was Blois Firm.

It boasted a long history, within which the family line that owned the store had been bequeathed the name of the store as a family name.

The ceiling was more than 2 stories high, and the shelves lining the walls were buried under a vast array of goods. The upper shelves were so high up that access to them apparently required the usage of ladders.

"Wha-?! Y-You're from yesterday....." The slightly chubby man who had chased Sofie away yesterday was there. Shouzou had learned from Sofie beforehand that he was the owner of the store. He was still in his thirties, but because his father had retired early, he was now the one who managed this large store.

"Good day, Blois-san."

"Wha-, what did you come here for? Wait, are you seriously going to threaten me—"

"No, no, that was a misunderstanding. Today, I've come to offer you my thanks."

"Th-Thanks.....?" Blois frowned suspiciously.

"Yesterday, I was really just coincidentally passing by. I'm a bit ashamed to say this, but I was actually wandering around in search of a place of employment. I just happened to be there at that time."

"Is, is that so.....? But what are you thanking me for then?" Blois tilted his head.

"Thanks to the fate of that encounter, I was able to become employed at the place where this girl works, Elunheine Adventurer's Guild." Sofie bobbed her head. However, she was not looking at Blois. In order to not miss a single gesture or action from Shouzou, she was glaring so hard at him that it almost seemed like a scowl.

Shouzou really wanted to caution her, but they were currently in

front of a customer, so he couldn't say anything.

"Hm~mm..... But it can hardly be said that I played any significant role in that, right?"

"I beg to differ. Due to having caused that misunderstanding with you, I approached her to offer her my apology. And then matters proceeded from there. If you had not misunderstood, then I would have simply passed by without saying a single word." Shouzou lowered his head deeply.

"Normally, such an occasion merits bringing a gift of some sort, but now it has simply become merely words of thanks. For that, I am deeply sorry."

"Oh, that's quite all right. All I did was misunderstand something. Now that I'm actually being thanked for it, it only just makes me embarrassed, truly."

"Oh no, how could I. I have been quite inconsiderate, I'm afraid....." Shouzou scratched his cheek in embarrassment, which caused Blois's expression to soften.

"Well anyways, please don't let it bother you any longer. Here I was, thinking you were a scary person, but you've turned out to be so humble. More like, rather than being employed at a guild, shouldn't you just become an adventurer outright?"

"I've been told that by a lot of people. However, it seems that it just doesn't suit me." By then, both of them were smiling, and the atmosphere had become quite relaxed. Or so Shouzou thought, until Blois's eyes turned to scrutinizing him.

"So then? You came in here under the guise of thanks, but why are you actually here?" As expected of a man who had taken over a large firm while so young, he proved himself quite sharp indeed.

However, Shouzou kept his cool. Instead of answering immediately, he panned to take a good look at the interior of the store. "This view, it's quite incredible indeed. With a store this huge, I literally have to look up due to the sheer number of products on the shelves."

"But of course. In terms of handling of raw materials, we are the very best in all of Treia. It's our policy to not deal with tiny transactions. So naturally, we have no appropriately sized quests to give to bottom feeder guilds." Before Shouzou could broach the subject, Blois had already implicitly asked them to make their exit.

"Naturally, I am well aware of that." Shouzou displayed no sign of being perturbed, instead even going so far as to make a smile while answering in an indifferent tone. "What we want to ask is for you to register the same quest with us that you have already registered with other adventurer's guilds." Not only Blois, even Sofie and Lalaine were astounded.

“Posting the same quest at multiple guilds at the same time is not forbidden, right?”

“You are correct, but if I also post at your place then I’d have to pay another deposit. Doing something akin to throwing precious money down the drain is something that I—”

“We will not ask for a deposit.” Once again, everyone aside from Shouzou froze with astonishment.

“And also, if the quest is completed at a different guild, we will *not* charge you a cancellation fee.” The first person to recover from what seemed like bombshells dropped in quick succession was Lalaine. She began muttering furiously to herself.

Next was Sofie, who raised her voice in protest.

“Hold on a second, Onigawara-san! If you do that then—”

“What problem would there be?”

“But, then, our money.....”

“Sofie-san, you mustn’t mistake your assumptions. We, as an adventurer’s guild, must always have the mentality of ‘quests that are accepted are to be completed,’ and do everything in our power to make that happen.”

An “Ohhhh” escaped from Sofie’s lips as figurative scales fell from her eyes. However, she still harbored a certain amount of unease.

“Deposits and cancellation fees are both *bad* practices, understand? For bottom feeder guilds, it’s the main factor that wards off quest, while for large guilds, it’s merely a way for them to pilfer small change. If you ask me, it seems stranger that they were even adopted in the first place, and that they remained in effect for so long.” There might be a place and time where such measures would be needed, but at the present moment, the only thing it was doing was acting to the disadvantage of bottom feeder guilds. Neither were they doing any service to the quest giver side either.

Blois murmured “Heeh~” as a satisfied smile spread over his face.

“Blois-san, so how about it?”

“.....Well, if you’ll be accepting quests completely free of charge, then that makes me want to give you all of them.”

“I’m sorry, we will be the ones to decide which quests we’ll be accepting.” Wrinkles appeared between Blois’s eyebrows.

Sofie became so flustered that her behavior bordered on being suspicious. Apparently this girl was the kind who, upon being emotionally shaken down, would externally betray her inner turmoil.

But now was not the time to talk to her about that.

“Your anger is fully justified. Surely you are thinking, ‘A bottom feeder guild is choosing jobs?’ However, yes, we are a bottom feeder guild. The quantity of quests that we can process at any given time is very limited. In order to ensure completion of the quest, careful

consideration on our part is of critical importance. We ask for your understanding.” Upon seeing Shouzou lower his head once again, Blois exhaled, then scratched his head.

“‘Ensure,’ huh. That’s quite some confidence you have there. Well, I don’t lose anything either way. So I’ll play along, then. Having said all that, I’m sure you have certain conditions in mind, right? Let’s hear them then.”

“Thank you for your consideration. We would like quests that have a rather far off deadline. Something due a month to three months later would be perfect.”

“So you want something that can be done slowly over time? Well, that’s fine too. Wait here a while.” Blois’s heavy body withdrew into the depths of his store.

During the wait, Sofie repeatedly sent Shouzou glances, as if she had something she was dying to ask. When he could no longer bear her restlessness any longer, Shouzou decided to broach the conversation from his end.

“If there is something that you want to say, then let’s hear it.” Having been prompted, Sofie straightened her back.

“Umm, the large majority of large-scale quests require several veteran adventurers working together to be completed. I don’t think such people would come to our place of their own accord.” She sounded so full of confidence while making this utterly pathetic declaration.

“Naturally.”

“Then—”

“But who said that we’re going to just twiddle our thumbs and wait for them to come?”

“Eh?” Sofie stroked her chin, then abruptly raised her voice with an “I got it!” face.

“Hawking! We’ll go out onto the streets and call out to them in a loud voice, right?”

“Wrong.”

“*Hauu.....*”

“Has that ever succeeded before?”

“.....No, it hasn’t.”

“I’m not surprised. Ah, Blois-san is coming back. We’ll continue this conversation later.”

Shouzou wrapped up the conversation for the moment, but not before whispering to Sofie, “When I talk with him, try to catch what she is muttering.” His eyes were directed toward the girl muttering alone to herself, Lalaine.

“For now, here are five of them. Which would you like?”

“Allow me to take a look please.” Shouzou accepted the papers

that detailed the quests, then read each and every one of them out loud.

Though this made Blois suspicious at the start—perhaps due to his initial impression of Shouzou being “a weird guy”—he did not interrupt him.

“Well then, next is..... this is for Keroriga wings, I see. Ones coated with moth scales, of which you need 12 large bags..... that’s quite the quantity..... the largest allowed quantity for a quest, I see. If I recall correctly, this is an ingredient for..... Magic Repellent Powder, the stuff that repels magic beasts.” Even while spinning his words, Shouzou concentrated his attention on his ears.

He had no prior knowledge about what a Keroriga was, nor what its scales were used for. Neither did he know that 12 large bags was the largest allowed quantity for a single quest.

It was all knowledge that he had learned right then and there, after reading the paper out loud.

The source was the tiny, tiny voice coming from behind his back.

Incidentally, was Sofie not gluing herself to Lalaine just a bit too closely?

“The approaching season is the one in which the magic beasts are more active, after all. The deadline is 2 months later.....” Seemingly unable to bear being silent any longer, Blois spoke up before Shouzou could continue again.

“The portion for this year had already been secured last year. And it’s not something that would rot or go bad, so every year around this time we gather them in advance for the next year. But with that said, the person who is going to fulfill this quest is pretty much already set in stone.”

“.....So it would seem.”

“And from what I hear, that adventurer and your place go quite far back, eh?” Judging by the blatant smirk on his face, this was a quest that he had brought out for the sole purpose of enjoying the reactions from Shouzou and the rest upon seeing it.

In actuality, Sofie’s face was looking quite pained. It was a rather rare expression for her.

“Indeed, so it would seem. All right then, we’ll be accepting this quest.”

“Eh?!”

“Ha?”

Sofie’s cry of surprise was first.

Blois looked like he just got pricked by his conscience, as his face turned into awkward embarrassment.

“I apologize for doing that, I admit it was in bad taste. You really don’t have to force yourself to take it.”

“No, no, don’t mind us. We’ll be accepting this one because we believe we can complete it.” After that, Shouzou chose one more out of the remaining quests.

He quickly took care of the paperwork to officially accept the quests, then deeply lowered his head.

“Thank you very much. We will continue to be in your care from here on.”

“It’s my first time being thanked after having a quest of mine accepted.” Blois’s final comment struck Shouzou deep in his chest.

No way was he going to accept being beat by all the other arrogant guilds.....

After leaving the store, Sofie suddenly raised her hand.

“Um, can we continue the conversation from earlier?” Upon seeing Shouzou indicate his approval, she continued in an unconfident tone. “Every time Onigawara-san read out loud the contents of a quest, Lalaine-san muttered out loud the characteristics of adventurers suitable for the quest. At times, she even mentioned some of them by name.....”

“Yes she did. So then?”

“That’s how I finally understood. We’re not going to wait passively, and we’re not going to be hawking in the streets. The plan is to actively approach the most suitable adventurers for the quests, am I correct?”

“That’s exactly it.” Shouzou’s full-faced smile cut a sharp contrast to Sofie’s slightly pained face.

“I see. So that is also forbidden by one of those unwritten customs. If I had to guess, the justification for it was that doing so would cause quests to all go to certain adventurers and thus would be unfair, or something along those lines?”

“Y-Yes. That was exactly it. How did you guess?”

“That’s just mere sophistry on the part of the major firms and larger guilds so they wouldn’t have to deal with extra admin work.”

“I’m sorry?”

“Lalaine-san, what do you think?” Having the conversation directed towards her caused her muttering to stop abruptly. But then she resumed muttering again in short order.

She was actually answering Shouzou’s question, but unlike her usual muttering, it was very slow and drawn out, so Shouzou summarized it in her place.

At the moment, the number of quests far outnumbered the number of adventurers.

Adventurers were separated into ranks. Accordingly, quests were also sorted into ranks. And the lower the rank, the more quests there were. Even if an adventurer could not find a quest that matched the

level of their ability, they merely had to look one rank lower. In other words, they wouldn't ever really be troubled for work.

Due to that, even if a certain number of quests became concentrated toward certain adventurers, it won't cause other adventurers to become unable to find work.

Sofie listened attentively while looking at Lalaine with envious eyes.

"Those large places, they just have to twiddle their thumbs while quests and adventurers naturally gather to them. However, if we bottom feeders do the same, our situation would only grow worse by the day. We have no other choice but to go on the offensive. Both quests and adventurers, we will have to go out to seize them ourselves." Sofie's expression grew stiff and serious. Lalaine's face was covered by her black hair and thus was not visible, but she was also nodding in silence. "Onigawara-san, could the reason why you chose a quest with a far off deadline be because you thought we could complete it faster than other guilds?"

"That's right. People tend to leave things with faraway deadlines on the back burner." Shouzou nodded with a smile.

"Well then. By playing the hand of abolishing both deposits and cancellation fees, we've successfully gotten ourselves some quests. The next step is to find the adventurers who can complete these quests for us."

Sofie raised her hand like a student who wanted to be called on.

"We'll lower the commission we take from the adventurers' rewards!"

"That would not be a wise thing to do."

"Why..... is that?" Shouzou was very happy to see her question him back without being discouraged.

"Unlike the deposit and cancellation fee, which were both bad practices, the commission is something that is clearly stipulated in the rules, and is our deserved remuneration. If we whittle it down, then one day, it will turn into a noose around our necks. It might be a good short-term plan, but it's a foolish idea in the mid to long term scheme of things. Just imagine the amount of animosity that we would get from the adventurers if we employed that strategy but revoked it somewhere down the road."

So then, what should they do? Sofie gulped, while Lalaine gazed at Shouzou through the gaps in her hair.

"We will offer..... added value." The two of them started.

"What is that.....?" But it seemed like neither of them quite understood it.

"We will offer the adventurers something that they would want but wouldn't be able to get if they accepted quests at other guilds. In

some cases, this would mean monetary kickbacks, but just like the lowering of commission discussed earlier, that would be ill-suited for us.” Shouzou continued his explanation by raising an example.

“Despite the current situation of there being a saturation of quests, each adventurer has their own strengths and weaknesses, likes and dislikes. So how about we actively find quests that would suit that adventurer, and introduce it to them? Well, this is just one example, though.” The two of them nodded deeply in understanding.

Sofie then raised her hand again.

“So you are saying that we will be tailoring what we offer to the other party?”

“That’s exactly right. To make that happen, we need to know the other party, analyze them, and prepare several suggestions.”

Which meant.....

“Let’s return to the guild, and talk it over with everyone over lunch!”

“Yes, please!”

“S-Sure.....”

Thus, the three of them headed back toward the guild in high spirits.

It hardly needs to be said, but Lalaine once again ran out of strength on the way, so Shouzou had to give her a piggyback—

Chapter 5: Exclusivity Contract

“Go away.” With that, the old man firmly closed his door.

His height was up to around Shouzou’s waist. He had a thin body with an overall reddish tinge and rough skin, a wrinkle-covered face, and one horn in the middle of his forehead, with a white moustache around his mouth and chin.

His name was Kopil, and he was a male goblin.

He lived by himself in a small wooden cabin within the depths of the forest located southeast of the fortress city Treia.

When Shouzou first knocked on his door, he was greeted by a good-natured old man who was delighted to offer hospitality to someone who had come all the way over from the city. Shouzou was invited in, served tea, and the atmosphere was very amicable overall. (*So this happens right after I identify myself as someone from Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild, huh.....*) However, as soon as Shouzou offered his business card and introduced himself, the old man’s face immediately turned into a scowl, and Shouzou found himself being chased out.

The enmity between this old man and the guild appeared to be very deep indeed.

Well then, what should I do about this...

Dogged insistence would hardly be a good tactic for a first meeting. But with that said, a readiness to retreat might be seen in a negative light.

His original purpose for coming there that day was to obtain more information on the situation, so he decided to take a look around.

He lifted his eyes to gaze at the back side of the cabin. There stood logs fitted together in a lattice, each as thick as a person’s arm. The crude fence looked to be about 15 meters in height. It continued into the distance both left and right, far as the eye could see.

The other side of the fence, however, was an entirely different world. It was enshrouded in fog, and the species of trees inside also differed markedly from those in the area. It looked almost like a jungle.

Shouzou started walking alongside the fence. It turned out to be a gigantic cage measuring 1km on all four sides. No, to be more exact, it was a *bug* cage.

The sound of flapping wings reached Shouzou’s ears. He turned around with trepidation, directing his eyes toward the source of the

sound. A gigantic insect was clinging to the inside of the fence.

It was a moth. It was a gigantic moth, almost the size of a full grown man. Its antennae were as dark as the wings of a crow, and its body was covered with soft-looking white hair. Scales sparkled dancingly on those wings that glittered with all seven colors. It was a species of magic beast called a Keroriga. The scales affixed to its wings made the Magic Repellent Powder that repelled magic beasts.

Magic Repellent Powder smelled repugnant, but the scales themselves had no smell whatsoever. In fact, the magic beasts themselves secreted a slightly sweet odor that could almost give someone the impression of being in a field of flowers.

U-Uumu.....

(When they're this big and even the smallest detail becomes so easy to see, it makes for quite the grotesque sight indeed.....) Shouzou was a man who couldn't even kill a bug, though that was because he was bad with bugs.

By nature, Kerorigas were magic beasts that lived in the tropics down south. They did not exist naturally anywhere in the entire kingdom, let alone the vicinity of Treia.

They were herbivores, but had very violent and aggressive personalities. Their move set included raising gusts of wind with their gigantic wings, using their scales to blind their targets, and throwing the entire weight of their gigantic bodies behind body slams, a list that made it hard to decide whether to classify Kerorigas as a clever or a musclebrained species.

Additionally, despite living separately without forming flutters, only when fighting against an external enemy did they call each other over. A fellow Keroriga being in danger was cause for all the others in the area to gather en masse.

Any run-of-the-mill adventurer could handle a single Keroriga, but it was not uncommon for more than a hundred to rush over at once. Apparently, what other nearby countries did was mobilize their army to gather Keroriga wings.

The man who managed, to everyone's astonishment, to raise such dangerous yet valued magic beasts was none other than the Old Man Kopil from just now.

After pouring in long years of effort, he finally succeeded in making Keroriga breed and flourish in a land with such a markedly different climate.

In this country, Kopil had a monopoly on the supply of Keroriga wings.

At the same time, he was also an adventurer.

After all, one required specialist qualifications in order to carry out work that involved the handling of magic beasts. The danger that

accompanied those jobs was definitely a reason, but magic beasts were also seen as a precious resource, so the prevention of their overhunting was also another reason.

In that light, the very act of breeding magic beasts could be said to be an extremely special case.

(If we manage to sign an exclusivity contract with Kopil, then the reputation of Elunheine Adventurer's Guild would shoot up all at once. It would also guarantee a steady source of income. I would very much like to make that happen, but.....) He could tell from the intuition that he had built up throughout his long years as a businessman.

This was going to be a tough case.

Kopil seemed to have a rather amicable personality, someone who he could get close to through earnestness and sincerity. However, the enmity between him and Elunheine Adventurer's Guild was also plain to see.

(Damn you, President. What nonsense "It was something so far in the past, I'm sure he's already forgotten it" turned out to be. As expected, this is not going to be a straightforward case.) Shouzou recalled yesterday's briefing session while walking.



"Old Man Kopil used to be one of our staff." With that, Adora began to explain the enmity between Old Man Kopil and the guild.

"Goblins are a race with weak bodies and low magical capability. However, that old man spent a really long time training, to the point where he could use quite a bit of magic. But with that said, nothing in his repertoire was of the offensive type." For the purpose of breeding Kerorigas, it was necessary to cast protective magic on the fence, and equally necessary to change the environment inside to a tropical one. Then when he hunted their wings, he also needed to paralyze them with magic.

"That was why we took up the task of protecting him. Back then, rumors would pop up every now and then of people who were aiming to snatch the wings he harvested. So Elu—my younger brother, the previous guildmaster—invited him to become one of our staff."

"I doubt this was the case, but you guys didn't fight with him over the distribution of profits, right?"

"That's not even funny as a joke. Elu was not such a miserly man. Kopil gave us almost all of his commission, so we were profiting even more than when he was hiring us for protection." With the monopoly over Keroriga wings in hand, what Kopil wanted was the guild's fighting strength as a backer, explained Adora.

His magic made him an extremely excellent support.

By becoming a member of "the most powerful adventurer's corp,"

he was no longer targeted anymore. He could even earn a little extra pocket money in the small breaks during his breeding business. Everything was perfect.

But then dark clouds cast shadows over this great relationship.

Elunheine, the guildmaster, died. Then the rule “staff of an adventurer’s guild may not be adventurers themselves” was established.

One had to be an adventurer to accept quests at an adventurer’s guild.

Kopil was both a breeder, as well as an adventurer. Being able to directly accept his own quests through the guild meant keeping the entirety of the commission as his own income. But quitting as an adventurer meant going out of the way to make quests for other adventurers. That meant a corresponding decrease in income.

“Staying affiliated with us meant having to give up one’s qualification as an adventurer. Almost all those who gathered to us due to their admiration for Elu ended up quitting. But with that said, we didn’t really blame them, since it was an obvious choice for their own livelihood. And so, I thought that the old man would also be quitting soon enough, but.....” —*Like I could do such a heartless thing!*

Kopil stayed, saying that he did not want to betray comrades that he had walked alongside with.

“What a strong sense of duty that old man has.” Seeing Shouzou looking impressed, Adora scoffed.

“No, no. That’s not it. That old man, he’s just foolish.” Based on what Shouzou had heard so far, evaluating him as “foolish” was not entirely off the mark.

Jobs involving magic beasts may only be done by adventurers. Naturally, that included breeding them.

The very next day after the new rule came into effect, Kopil was called to the public office, and ordered to surrender the breeding grounds. The possibility of this happening had apparently never occurred to him.

He wailed and clung to Adora, but she turned him away, saying that there was nothing that a single adventurer’s guild could do.

In the end, it was another adventurer’s guild that submitted a written petition that cited “it would negatively affect the steady supply of a top tier material,” which led to the management of breeding grounds being accepted as an exception.

However, Kopil’s qualification as an adventurer was still frozen for two years. Furthermore, the longer he stayed affiliated to an adventurer’s guild, the longer that period would become. So he had no choice but to quit Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild.

“Our policy is to not chase after those who want to leave. Even

though we saw him off with no hard feelings, that old man spat ‘this was all you guys’ fault!’ at us.”

“Can I speak my opinion?”

“You don’t have to say it, I know. That’s misplaced resentment, right?” Adora shrugged her shoulders as if to say “good grief,” but.....

“Both sides were to blame.” Shouzou did not mince his words.

“You should have foreseen that he would no longer be able to continue managing his breeding grounds once he lost his qualifications as an adventurer. Your follow up after he came crying to you was also done poorly. If you had been the first to do what that other adventurer’s guild did, then this enmity would not have been born.” In contrast, the other guild did a great job using the situation to get their hands on the monopoly over a material’s entire market.

“I mean, it’s not so much an enmity, it’s more like he’s just one-sidedly angry at us. But well, it happened so far in the past, I’m sure that old man has gone senile by now and forgotten all about it.” Even while trying to laugh it off, Adora was wiping cold sweat off—



Shouzou was almost done making one lap around the fence. It seemed like there were a thousand Kerorigas inside the enclosure.

(I’m sure it must be tiring for a single old man to manage and maintain a breeding ground this large.) He was almost back at the cabin again while mulling over that thought.

“Please wait a moment, Kopil-san! Why are you saying that all of a sudden?!”

“You’re being annoying. It’s already set in stone. You don’t have to come over to help anymore.”

“Wa— that’s a problem for me. Without the work here, my livelihood.....”

“Aren’t you making your living as an adventurer? You can’t smolder in this kind of place forever, now can you?”

“But.....”

“That’s enough!” Kopil and a young man were arguing vehemently.

The younger man had on light armor, with a sword buckled at his waist. He looked to be in his early twenties. He had short, chestnut-colored hair. In contrast to his getup, he was thin and lanky in an unreliable sort of way.

Kopil turned his back, and accidentally met Shouzou’s eyes in doing so.

“The heck, yer still here? Get the hell outta here already.” The young man looked towards the direction towards where Kopil spat in anger. Then he started upon seeing Shouzou.

“Kopil-san, that person is.....?”

“Ahh, a staff member from that shitty guild. What they want after all this time is beyond me.....” Kopil spat out a sigh one last time, then withdrew into his cabin and closed the door.

“Ah, Kopil-san, wait a—sighhh..... Hm? Wait, ‘shitty guild’?! Don’t tell me..... OI!” The youngster shot a glare towards Shouzou.

“Hey, are you from Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild?”

“I am. What of it?”

“What the hell’s your business with Kopil-san, huh?” Despite feeling ruffled from the sudden aggressiveness, Shouzou answered him matter-of-factly.

“To discuss a business deal with him.”

“After doing something so horrible to him, you have the gall to.....” Even if it’s the same story, when told by a different person, then it could become completely different. Shouzou wondered how Kopil told his side of the story to this young man. In the same vein, he knew better than to fully believe what Adora had told him.

Thinking it the perfect opportunity, Shouzou wanted to hear the other side’s version from the young man. However.

“Don’t you dare come near here ever again!!” The youngster drew his sword and rushed towards Shouzou in assault.

But it was worth noting that he was directing the back of the blade toward Shouzou, not the edge. In other words, he didn’t intend on killing Shouzou. But he probably wanted to hit and threaten him.

Clang! Shouzou stood perfectly still and simply took the attack.



“Owww.....” It was the youngster whose voice sounded pained. He had every intention of sending his opponent flying, but the resistance that he met was way beyond what he had expected. It felt like he had just slammed his sword against a boulder, and his hands had gone entirely numb.

“Violence right off the bat, eh?” Shouzou looked down to see the young man quivering and looking up at him with a face dyed with terror.

“However, I give you credit for your attitude of wanting to protect the old man.” The young man’s pure, untainted eyes caused Shouzou to grin.

As the young man stared dazedly, Shouzou pronounced in a tone that brooked no refusal.

“I want to have a chat with you. Do you have some time?” Still not fully understanding what’s going on, the young man thoughtlessly dipped his chin—

After distancing themselves from the cabin, the two found an area where tree roots protruded prominently, then sat down next to each other.

“This is who I am.” Shouzou proffered his business card. The young man maintained the look of suspicion on his face, but at least made the effort to introduce himself as Yunoh in a courteous tone.

“So let’s dive right into it. Will you tell me what your relationship with Kopil-san is?”

“During the time when Kopil-san’s adventurer qualification was frozen, I was the one who undertook the quests for Keroriga wings.” This answer was exactly what Shouzou had expected from the part of the quarrel that he had overheard.

However, Shouzou was mulling over the question of “why him?”

All the actual work was being carried out by Kopil alone. He was, for all intents and purposes, just lending his name to this young man.

In normal cases, name lending was against the rules, but the breeding of Kerorigas was being treated as an exception.

That meant that it wouldn’t be strange for anyone to serve as the name borrower. But with that being said, Shouzou couldn’t see anything about this youngster—who looked quite inexperienced as an adventurer—that could explain why Kopil chose him over anyone else.

Shouzou voiced his question out loud, and immediately got an answer.

“There wasn’t very much to our meeting, really. About a year and a half ago, I found Kopil-san collapsed in the city, so I helped him. Apparently his chronic back pain had been acting up, so I carried him

all the way to his cabin, then nursed him back to health. Then when he learned that I was an adventurer, he asked if I would like to accept quests on his behalf.” But the old man had a huge sense of duty, so contrary to what Yunoh thought, Kopil very much took to heart what Yunoh had done for him.

“I see. But this year, Kopil-san will finally get back his qualification as an adventurer, so the quest to borrow his name is going to be retracted, right?”

“Yeah..... But honestly speaking, that’s fine with me. I was fully aware that this was a role that I was unworthy of.”

Where’s this going? Shouzou tilted his head in puzzlement. “Then why were you arguing with Kopil-san? Does it have anything to do with the ‘helping out’ that I heard you mention?”

“Yes it does. When Kopil-san’s back still hurt, I had helped out at the breeding ground. Not directly, but through an adventurer’s guild.” And as it turned out, he had continued helping out here and there even after Kopil made a complete recovery.

“The Kerorigas themselves, they can be left to their own devices. But the managing of their food is a ton of work. For starters, when the plants that serve as the Kerorigas’ food grow too much, they turn poisonous. Also, if there is an over-abundance of food, the Kerorigas will overeat, which will negatively affect their quality.” In the natural world, there existed other magic beasts that fed off of the same plants that were resistant to that poison, thus preventing the Kerorigas from going extinct. However, in this breeding ground, the absence of such magic beasts meant that the caretakers had to manage that themselves.

“At first, I seriously hated it. It’s tough, and the pay isn’t that good. But the longer I kept at it, the more I found myself enjoying it.” Yunoh flashed a bashful smile for an instant, then immediately slumped his shoulders.

“But then Kopil-san suddenly said ‘I don’t need your help anymore.’” His next words came as a shock to Shouzou.

“He was like, ‘Cus I’m going to close the breeding grounds.’ I mean, I don’t even.....” To learn that the breeding ground itself was going to be shut down, right when he was aiming to snag the exclusivity contract to the place.....

“That’s a problem.”

“It’s a problem for me too!”

“Do you know what prompted Kopil-san to close the breeding ground?”

“I don’t know. I asked him, but he wouldn’t tell me.....” Shouzou crossed his arms and groaned while pondering. But if nothing came to mind for even Yunoh, who had been working together with the man

for a long time, then there was no way that Shouzou, who had only met him for the first time today, could think of anything.

Despite that, he continued desperately trying to analyze the situation.

(*Hm? Which reminds me.....*) He recalled something that had caught his attention from the exchange he heard between the two of them earlier.

—Aren't you making your living as an adventurer? —You can't smolder in this kind of place forever, now can you?

"Is it possible that he is doing it because he wants you to become a full-fledged adventurer?" Even he thought this was a long stretch, but Shouzou voiced this theory with the feeling of clutching at straws.

But as expected, Yunoh shook his head with a "no way."

"Though it's true that he once asked me what my plans for the future were and so I answered 'I want to make it as an adventurer'..... Which reminds me, I think he looked slightly miffed at the time. AHHH! Surely that's what made him angry. Because he thought I was thinking of the breeding grounds as a mere stepping stone! That's gotta be it!" Yunoh clutched his head.

"That must be it. Then he must have realized how unpopular this job is with the younger generation, which made him stop caring altogether. There's no doubt. Shit, it's all my fault....."

"Uh, aren't you making a big leap in logic there?"

"Then what could it have been?!" Shouzou dropped his shoulders, thinking how he was the one who wanted to know the answer—

"Unpopular, with the youngsters.....? The job of breeding Kerorigas is not that attractive?"

"I mean, yeah, like I said, it's tough, and the pay for someone merely helping out is quite low. In actuality, the quest was up on the board for the longest time, and it was always left untouched. I felt bad for the quest giver, that's why I accepted it in the first place." Shouzou attempted to sort things out inside his head, completely neglecting Yunoh for a while.

To close up a place like the breeding grounds that generates such significant profit would be a decision of enormous weight. Behind it was surely conflict or discord of proportionate severity.

However, to make this decision at this point in time—right when Kopil was on the verge of regaining his adventurer qualification—felt instead quite hasty and impulsive.

No, perhaps this was something that he had been considering for a while, and Yunoh's words merely served as the trigger.

If that's the case, then the opposite way of looking at things might also merit consideration.

(*What if Kopil-san had already been thinking about closing the*

breeding grounds for a while? And then he just carried it out at this time?)
A shiver ran through Shouzou as he felt the disconnected puzzle pieces starting to fall into place.

“So that’s why!” Shouzou leapt to his feet, then pointed straight at Yunoh. “You were the reason!”

“As I’d thought?!” Tears welled up at the corner of Yunoh’s eyes.

“No, that’s not it. I’m sorry. I was so excited that I inadvertently skipped the explanation.” Shouzou sat back down, then lightly placed a hand on Yunoh’s shoulder.

“I am going to have you become my ‘added value.’”

“I’m sorry, what?”

After reigning in his own overwhelming excitement, Shouzou slowly and thoroughly explained everything from start to finish.

“And so? What do you think about giving it a try?”

“..... Yes! Yes please! I’ll do it! If it’s within my means, I’ll do it!”

After listening attentively, he replied with eyes filled with resolve.

Shouzou nodded in satisfaction.

“But before that, I’m going to need you to take a little examination.”

“Examination, sir?”

“That’s right. If you don’t pass it, I’m afraid that whatever you do, it would be useless.” Yunoh’s face turned increasingly stiff, perhaps due to having guessed what it was that Shouzou was referring to.

“And one last thing, a warning.” Yunoh gulped audibly.

“When you see the person who will be performing the examination, don’t faint at that person’s incredible beauty.”

“I’m sorry, what?” Shouzou hoisted Yunoh onto his shoulder as the latter was still blinking in confusion and began running off.

Toward his home, the place where his beloved wife was waiting for him—



The next time, with all preparations in order, Shouzou once again visited the little cottage where Kopil lived.

Accompanied by Yunoh, as well as Adora, his guild’s President.

But with that said, he had every expectation of being turned away at the door. If it came to that, then it would merely become a war of attrition. He was fully resolved to come again and again, as many times as it would take for the old man to agree to listen to what he had to say.

But to his astonishment, Kopil beckoned them in without much resistance.

Maybe he had actually been waiting all this time for someone from Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild to come apologize.

Inside the barren room with wooden flooring.

“You still holding a grudge about that? I see you’re a tiny man just like before, hah? Exactly the same as how you look!”

“What did you say, huh?! What about you, still as pudgy and chubby and obese as ever! Does it mean that even living poorly can’t help you lose weight?”

“I dare you to say that again!”

“Sure, I can say it any number of times!” The very instant Adora and Kopil saw each other’s faces, they broke out into a quarrel.

The two of them were merely cursing at each other with language as colorful as they could manage, such that the conversation was making no headway whatsoever.

However, Shouzou merely sat and watched on, showing no intention of stopping or interrupting them.

Unable to bear it any longer, Yunoh leaned in towards Shouzou.

“Shouldn’t we stop them?”

“Both of them have an obstinate side. For these kinds of people, it’s better for them to get everything off their chest that they have bottled up inside.” Shouzou replied with a smile, urging Yunoh to be quiet and just keep watching.

The quarrel continued for way more than an hour.

By then, both of them had shouted themselves hoarse, and their heaving shoulders betrayed how out of breath they both were. Due to having drawn close to their limits, their utterances had grown short, and the momentum from the start had petered out.

Until finally—

“.....It was my bad.” With eyes averted, words of remorse spilled out from Adora’s mouth.

“Elu had just died, so I was worrying about how to keep things going after that, and my mind was just too filled to think straight.....”

“Hmph, what’s with you getting meek all of a sudden. That’s not like you at all.”

“What did you say?!”

“Heh, I was the same, my mind was also too filled to think straight. Guess I was partly at fault too.....”

“Kopil.....”

“AHH! No more of this gloominess! We’re done with this topic. It’s already been two whole years. Digging all this back up isn’t doing anyone any favors.” Kopil turned to look towards the side. His cheeks were as red as they could get.

Thankfully, the enmity was apparently resolved before the talks even began.

Despite the situation feeling slightly anticlimactic, Shouzou finally opened his mouth.

“Well then, since it seems all the ill will has finally dissipated, let us move onto talking business.”

“Jackass, can’t you read the mood?”

“I believe I’ve already given the mood its due consideration. Well then, we have taken on a quest to procure Keroriga wings. We wish for Kopil-san to accept that quest.”

“Sure.” With a quick harrumph, Kopil readily agreed. But after shooting a look at Yunoh, he continued in a weaker tone of voice.

“But him being here means that you’ve already heard, right? I’m going to close this place down. I’ll be putting all the Kerorigas down, so there’ll be a ton of wings. So much that there’ll probably be leftovers after fulfilling all the quests up right now, yours included.”

“Yes indeed, we have heard. It is in light of that that we are making our request.”

Shouzou abruptly leaned forward. “Please reconsider closing the breeding grounds down.”

“Come again?”

“Furthermore, we wish to sign an exclusivity contract with you that would guarantee the prioritizing of our Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild next year onward as well.” The inside of the cottage fell dead silent.

Kopil squinted his eyes.

“Jackass, were you listening to the conversation?”

“Of course I was. But I am not requesting an exclusivity contract based on past goodwill. We have come here prepared to fulfill your wish.”

“My... wish.....?”

Shouzou sat up straight, but someone else from the side jumped out in front of him. The person who lowered his head so low as to grind it into the ground was none other than Yunoh.

“Please allow me to work here!”

“Wa— kid, what are you saying? I’ve already told you that you can’t work here anymo—”

“Please teach me everything there is to know about how to breed Kerorigas!”

“What?” Kopil froze. With his whole body quivering, he swiveled only his eyes towards Shouzou.

“Kopil-san, is the reason why you were about to close the Keroriga breeding grounds down because you couldn’t find a successor?”

“.....”

“Isn’t it something that you’d been thinking about ever since that time when your lower back pain flared up again?”

“.....” Kopil could not answer. However, everyone present understood his silence to be affirmation.

“After having your adventurer qualifications frozen, you were ready to close the place down any time. But when you saw how Yunoh-san worked, you wanted to entrust the place to him, right? You were even mulling over the idea of genuinely apprenticing him once your qualifications were restored.” But then on a certain day, Yunoh told Kopil that he “wanted to make it as an adventurer.” Yunoh himself didn’t mean much with those words, but Kopil took them seriously as a youngster’s declaration of ambition.

Their original agreement was that the name lending would only be until Kopil’s adventurer qualification was restored.

That made it a good opportunity to cut off his relationship with Yunoh.

“And that is why you decided to see him off and then close down the breeding grounds. You were worried that if you didn’t make the break clean and final, it might leave room for quarrel and ill will afterward. Just as it had with yourself and our guild.”

Kopil exhaled quickly.

“Yeah, it’s exactly as you said. But there’s just one thing that y’all are mistaken about.”

“Mistaken about?”

“That guy? He can’t use magic. When dealing with Kerorigas, being at least as proficient with magic as me is an absolute requirement.” Silence descended.

Shouzou grinned as if enjoying every moment of it.

“Indeed, you are right. Yunoh-san doesn’t have even a scrap of magical talent.”

“Eh?” fell from Kopil’s mouth in astonishment.

Kopil was no expert in magic. It was through self-study that he had managed to become as proficient as he was, but in truth, he had no idea whether Yunoh had any talent or not. That was why he had actually been nursing a small amount of expectation of someone else taking a look at Yunoh and discovering some hidden talent, but.....

“We had the person who is probably the most knowledgeable about magic in this entire world inspect him. The result that came back was, ‘not a shred of talent.’”

“Ehhh..... Wait, no, maybe if someone even more knowledgeable takes a look at him—”

“That is impossible. Since she had already determined him to be without talent, it means Yunoh-can will definitely never be able to use magic.”

“I-I s-see...”

“It is really quite unfortunate indeed.”

“I suppose it i—.....wait oi! Isn’t this conversation heading in a really strange direction?”

“There is nothing strange about it at all. He has no talent with magic. However, he is perfect as a successor.” Kopil’s “Hah?” expressed his bewilderment in its entirety.

Despite having been disparaged for so long, Yunoh showed no sign of being disheartened, instead turning toward Kopil earnestly.

“I cannot use magic. I have no talent. However—” His eyes were sparkling. “I can just hire someone who can use magic!”

“Uh, um, sure I guess.....”

“Rather, I will marry someone who can!”

“Uh, um, good luck.....” The wind seemed to have gone out of Kopil’s sails.

In actual fact, Shouzou had also given up at one point.

The magic specialist that he had arranged for Yunoh to meet was none other than the goddess who was his wife, Silvia.

“No matter how hard he tries, he will never be able to use magic.” When he heard her say that, he truly despaired.

However, upon resetting his train of thought and adopting a different perspective, he came upon the conclusion that Yunoh had just announced.

If you can’t do something, then just have someone else do it for you.

He can just outsource!

“We cannot promise anything, but we will also do our best to recommend suitable wife candidates to Yunoh-san. Though we cannot promise anything.”

“That’s quite some heavy emphasis there eh.....” Kopil brusquely scratched his horned head. “All right, all right already. It’s my loss. Though his ability might not amount to much, at least you’ve found me an eager successor. I’ll continue the work. Which means—” A broad grin came over his face.

“Guess I’ll sign that exclusivity contract with you guys then.”

“Thank you very much!” Shouzou extended his right hand.

Kopil grasped it in a firm grip.

With this, for all intents and purposes, Shouzou had just completed his first job. Or his first quest, so to speak.

“The matter of Yunoh’s wife..... I’m seriously counting on you guys, all right? I won’t even insist on anything so extravagant as being able to use magic, so seriously, yeah?”

Shouzou could not find it in himself to return the firm grip with equal strength—

Side Story 2: The Three Sisters' Potential

During that sleepy period of time after lunch the two older Onigawara sisters were pouring their everything into studying at the dining table in the house.

“Kana, isn’t this material from fourth grade?”

“I’m bad with math.....”

“It’s because you tell yourself you’re bad with it that you end up doing it sloppily. All right, next is $138 \div 25$. Give it a try.”

“Yep, it’s 5.”

“Uh, can’t you tell by looking that it isn’t divisible?”

“Then, roughly 5.”

“..... You’re roughly correct.”

“Seriously?!”

“Where did 5 come from?”

“So, 10 of 25 is 250, right? So it’s roughly half of that, is what I thought.”

“The way you’re thinking is correct. But you’ve gotta properly show your work..... Look here, what do you get when you divide this by 5?”

“*Nnn*, 5×5 is 25, then..... 5×2 is 10, so it becomes 125.....”

“See, you’ve already arrived at the answer.”

“5 with a remainder of 12?”

“The remainder is 13. Stay focused till the end, come on.”

“Ugghh..... In the first place, can’t you just have other people do math for you?”

“Can’t you at least do it yourself with a calculator?”

The person who was supposed to be teaching them—Emalia—was merely looking on.

(There’s nothing for me to do.....) Recently, Yuna was breezing through all the work that Emalia assigned her, then was using her remaining time to look over her younger sister’s studies. The time she was spending on her own assignments was shortening day by day, which effectively meant her time looking after Kana was growing day by day.

So whenever Kana had a question, she would ask Yuna first.

Consequently, Emalia found herself with nothing to do.

(But still, Yuna-san really is brilliant.) Even though it hasn’t been

long since they began studying in earnest, she had already fully understood all the material from the first semester of seventh grade.

(It should be fine to begin tackling more advanced material, right? Yep, it should be fine. If we don't find her wall soon, I'd seriously have nothing to do.....) Emalia was actually struggling with what she felt to be a very real threat towards her very *raison d'être*.

As the afternoon lessons continued on, "Good morning-sama~!" Hina, the third daughter, came down the stairs from the second floor. Apparently she had just woken up from her afternoon nap, with her energy bar completely filled up.

"Oh, Hinacchi is up. All right, let's play!" Kana's sleepy eyes became filled with energy in a split second.

"I suppose this is a good place to stop. Let's take a break then." With that, the study session ended with Emalia unable to contribute anything at all.

After playing for a while in the yard.

Ding dong.

Unexpectedly, their doorbell rang.

Silvia headed to the intercom in response.

"Oh, honey. What's the matter? Why are you back so soon?" Despite it still being a ways off from his usual time, Shouzou had come back home.

"Eh? You want me to measure his magic capacity? Sure, I'll come out immediately." Silvia hurried towards the front door with her slippers flapping noisily.

"Otoo-sama is home?"

"It seems there's someone else too."

The two younger sisters exchanged looks.

"A guest!"

"Let's go take a look." Circling out from the yard, they made their way toward the front door.

"Hold on, you two. That's disrespectful!" Contrary to what she was saying, Yuna looked like she was having fun too while chasing behind them.

"No, seriously, you girls shouldn't do that!" Emalia then chased after the three sisters in a fluster.

Peeking out from the shadows of the house, they spied Shouzou and Silvia on the front porch, accompanied by an unfamiliar young man. He was a lanky guy with short chestnut-colored hair.

"Who is that, Uncle?"

"Isn't he a 'yungsta'~?"

"When it comes to adults, you can't really tell their age by their appearance. But at the very least, he really isn't much to look at, is he."

“He is a weakling-sama~”

“I agree, he doesn’t look reliable at all.”

“Girls, your voices are too loud!” Emalia felt anxious with the sisters running their mouths as they pleased.

But the three sisters’ critical commentary showed no sign of abating.

“That uncle, he’s been staring at Mama’s boobs the whole time.”

“Guys are just.....” As the two older sisters directed their stares filled with judgment at him, Hina spoke up with innocent eyes.

“Hina-sama also really loves boobies~?”

“That’s a fair point, I love them too. Rubbing Mama’s boobs is really calming.”

“Feelings of chrankuility~!”

“She hasn’t really let me rub them for quite a while,” said Kana with far-off eyes.

“Hina-sama gets to rub them every morning, every night, and during naptime too~”

“Lucky you.....”

Although she didn’t actually join in on this conversation between her younger sisters, Yuna was also nodding along every once in a while as if to indicate agreement.

“Um, girls, don’t you think it’s about time we head back inside?” Thinking that this conversation was not quite conducive for their education, Emalia attempted to get them moving.

But the three sisters merely stared at Emalia’s conservative breasts wordlessly.

“I’m sorry, I guess.....” Emalia ended up apologizing, unable to bear it any longer. Despite both of them being goddesses, the gap between the two was all too obvious, much to her chagrin.

“Oh, no, we didn’t mean anything by that.....”

“Emalia-sensei’s have a good shape. That’s what I thought when we took a bath together last time.” Although the older sisters tried to smooth things over, Hina just made things worse.

“Too small, not enough to feed a baby~” At times, little children say the most hurtful things.

“Don’t worry, Hinacchi. Even the small ones can produce a lot. I think.”

“Isn’t it said that they get bigger when you get pregnant?” The elder sisters had pretty much exhausted their ability to provide any further follow up.

“So there’s still hope~? Emalia-sensei-sama, that’s great!”

(Can I cry now.....)

As the sisters engaged in a lively conversation about boobs, Silvia gazed at the young man and cheerfully pronounced judgment.

“This person has absolutely zero talent with magic.” The young man took it with such visible shock that it looked like the sky had fallen on him. Shouzou’s brows also twitched very noticeably.

However, after talking a while longer, Shouzou slapped his hands together as if a brilliant idea had just occurred to him.

Eventually Shouzou, with the young man in tow, went off again. (*Did he want to check that young man’s magical affinity?*) Emalia turned to look at the three sisters.

“Come on, let’s go back in and pick up where we left off.”

“Hold o—?! I didn’t get to play at all!”

“Hina-sama will be drawing~!” Half of the blood that flowed within these girls who were amicably returning to the yard together was inherited from a Grade 1 goddess.

(*They probably aren’t just normal kids, right.....?*) Emalia didn’t have the ability to gauge someone’s magic by merely looking at them. Which is why she decided to put her hand on the head of Hina, who happened to be closest to her.

(Appearance-wise, she bears the most resemblance to the Madam. It would make sense for her to have at least some magic, right?) She drove her consciousness through her hand, into Hina, and—

“—Eeep?!” She felt herself being repelled by something, with a palpable crackle. Emalia inadvertently jerked her hand back.

“Emalia-sensei? What’s wrong?”

“Hm? Whaddup?” The elder sisters looked over wonderingly.

To which Hina cheerily replied, “My head got rub-rubbed~ ♪” Nothing seemed to have happened.

(*What was that just now.....?*) There was no pain lingering in the palm of her hand. Neither was there any wound. Not even a tinge of numbness. It felt like she had been repelled by a physical force, but Hina showed no signs of reacting to it.

Emalia dazedly stared at the three sisters as they walked away.

(*This..... is probably a matter I should leave well alone, yep.*) Nothing had happened.

That’s what she ended up telling herself—

Chapter 6: M&A

“How’s that!” Guildmaster Adora was reclined on the sofa in the reception room with her arms spread out.

In the seat in front of her was a man in his fifties who had a smile plastered on his face. He was carefully counting the money stacked on the low table between them, piece by piece.

“That is indeed the full amount owed up until this month’s installment.” The purpose of his visit today was for debt collection. He worked at the largest bank in the city. The wrinkles on his face only deepened as he accepted the amount due, in addition to everything that had been piling up thus far.

“Business is going well, it seems. But still, abolishing the deposit fee, that was quite the daring move, wasn’t it?”

“Well, y’know, once you think about it, it is a pretty weird practice, innit? But thanks to it, our success now is as you see.”

“Fair enough. But aren’t things going to get tough from here on?” The bank employee wiped the smile off his face.

“Other guilds have also started to follow suit in abolishing their deposit practices. This place is still the same as before in that all the quests you handle are repeats that can be accepted someplace else, right?”

“! Well, yeah. But, you know, we’re accumulating achievements, so that’s where this comes in, y’see?”

“I shall look forward to those achievements, then.” The bank employee stood up, bowed quickly, then left.

Adora turned toward Shouzou, a smirk on her face.

“That sly geezer. From the moment he stepped in until the moment he left, he was shooting glances at you the entire time.”

“That was a pretty disrespectful attitude that he had, especially for being in front of a guildmaster.”

“Well, there’s no denying that you’ve become quite the topic of rumor these days. ‘The remarkable businessman who pushed a bottom feeder guild to great heights,’ is it?”

“We are still quite far off from ‘great heights.’ It is not only the abolishing of the deposit fee that he mentioned. There are also guilds here and there who have also begun directly approaching adventurers for business. Our lead is slowly crumbling even as we speak.” Their start had been from a disadvantaged position, to put things mildly.

And just when they seemed to catch up, they found themselves at risk of having the gap widen again.

“Repeating these tiny steps would only serve to delay the inevitable.” Back when he was hired, Shouzou had made a declaration.

That, within a single year, he would push away the gargantuan Goldas Adventurer’s Guild and claim the top place in this industry.

“And so, our most urgent task at the moment is expansion.” Currently, they had a severe shortage of manpower. That was why they had been incapable of doing anything big, or anything else significant in quick succession.

“Expansion, you say..... Expansion means more people, right? And more people means more work for me, as the guildmaster, right? Can we just not.....” Adora shook her head in despondence. “In the first place, where are we going to get the capital for that? We already have our hands full just paying back our debt right now. What’s wrong with first fully paying back our debt, then saving up for a while, before finally doing something flashy?”

“President, that logic is fundamentally flawed. Binding ourselves to that means letting opportunities slip through our fingers. Merely maintaining our current position means we will eventually be backed into a corner. As a bottom feeder guild, it is imperative that we continue to play our cards one step before all the other guilds.” No matter how many small changes they adopted, the overall effect would not amount to much.

And that was why Shouzou was thinking that they needed to do something huge, something that would push them out of bottom feeder status and into the industry’s middle range in a single shot.

“That’s the face you make when you’re thinking of doing something crazy again. Let’s hear it, then. Exactly what is it that you plan to do?”

Light blazed from both of Shouzou’s eyes as he announced with a clear voice.

“An acquisition.”

“Come again?”

“We will use money to buy out a mid-sized adventurer’s guild.”

“WHAAT?!” Adora and all company present widened their eyes in shock.

“This was not a rare thing in the organization that I worked for previously. An emergent organization with great momentum buying out a larger organization whose momentum had faltered in order to suddenly jump up in size. By acquiring both a well-situated location and human resources that can be converted into immediate assets, it becomes possible to gain even greater momentum.”

“I understand the words that you’re saying, but..... Where on earth are we going to get the money to buy out another guild?” Despite looking at him with narrowed eyes, there was a definite trace of expectation deep within.

However, the answer that Shouzou provided was a truly common one.

“We borrow it.” Both of Adora’s shoulders dropped with disappointment.

“Who on earth is crazy enough to lend such a large amount of money to a bottom feeder guild?”

“Aren’t there places already making exceptions for this bottom feeder guild?”

“If you’re thinking of the bank, then you might as well give up now. The only reason why they lent us money in the first place was because we put up both this house and land as collateral. Though this rundown house might not be worth much, the land can go for quite a bit. The location is a bit tucked away, so it might not seem suitable for doing business, but it is quiet and safe as a residential plot.”

“Well, well, let’s leave the minor details for later. To be honest, I don’t think it’s going to be that hard to gather the money. Rather than that, we need to decide which guild it is that we want to buy.”

“Now that’s an even taller order. Which guild would be crazy enough to agree to being bought out by us?”

“I already have candidates in mind. Leaving aside the biggest three guilds, there is the guild that was the first to copy what we did, and there is the guild that caught up only recently.” The former proved itself sensitive to the times and capable of taking quick action. Their administration had ambition. The latter was late in adopting trends and was simply floundering on. Their administration was dull-witted.

“It seems it would be difficult for the latter to follow up with us even if we bought them out. We would have to let the majority of their administration go, keeping only a bare minimum. In contrast, I very much want to accept the entire administration of the former into our own. Though they are ambitious, my investigating makes me think there is a real chance.”

“So you are basically saying that you’ve effectively already narrowed it down to a single choice?” Shouzou nodded solemnly, then announced the name of that guild.

Immediately, Sofie leapt up abruptly from the sofa before his eyes, and—

“That’s impossible!”

“That ain’t possible!” Her voice harmonized with Adora’s.



Two days later, Shouzou arrived at the guild he had in mind, with Sofie in tow.

The location was a relatively newer three-story building situated on the main avenue.

Shining Eagle Adventurer's Guild. Amongst the majority of adventurer's guilds that were named after their founders, this guild stood out with its unconventional name.

"Onigawara-san, I still think this is impossible~" Unlike her usual self, Sofie was almost whining.

Beforehand, Adora and Sofie had practically talked his ear off repeatedly, stressing how formidable an opponent this guild's guildmaster is.

In short, this guildmaster is not someone who can be talked to.

Stubborn to no end, never bending in opinion, returning only repudiation regardless of what is said. That was the general evaluation going around.

The two of them already knew this guildmaster personally, and were thoroughly familiar with their personality.

Upon listening to their accounts, Shouzou himself also began to think this guildmaster slightly eccentric.

However, in spite of that, Shouzou was still confident, no matter how "impossible" his opponent might be. After analyzing this guild's financial situation and quest completion rate, it was his belief that there was definitely room for persuasion.

It was exactly because he thought there was a chance at success that he was making the trip.

"In any case, we've already made an appointment, so let's meet and talk first." They had sent word in advance of their visit.

The reply that came back was instructions to come this day at 10 a.m.

Naturally, he had made no mention of wanting to buy them out. He had kept it vague with mentions of paying his greetings and hints at an important business talk.

Upon stepping through the door, they saw adventurers talking with reception staff. There were a total of 5 counters, and they were all occupied. There were also a few adventurers waiting for their turn.

The location was great. Shouzou was reminded once again how big an advantage this was in and of itself.

Then they noticed an out-of-place crowd a ways off from the counters. A young girl was saying something to more than ten men in armor. She had blond hair flowing down in ringlets. Her slightly sharp-looking eyes did not detract in any way from her adorable face.

She was wearing a black gothic-style dress, had her hands on her hips, and was throwing out her modestly-sized chest.

“Hm? I wonder what is Elizabeth-san doing?” murmured Sofie, seemingly also having caught sight of the scene.

The girl’s name was Elizabeth Caroque.

Hailing from a noble family, she was in fact the guildmaster of Shining Eagle Adventurer’s Guild, at the tender age of fourteen.

Elizabeth also noticed Shouzou and company. When she caught sight of Sofie, her face broke into a beam. Leaving behind the armored men, she strode over with swift steps. “Sorry, today’s talk is canceled.” That was the first thing that came out of her mouth. After which, she signaled the men waiting with her eyes, then walked right past Shouzou and company.

The first person who reacted was Sofie.

“Wait, what? Elizabeth-san?! What happened?!” Elizabeth abruptly stopped in her tracks, then whirled around with another smile on her face.

“I have something urgent to do now. So, sorry. Let’s talk at a later date.” This time, it was Shouzou who called back the girl before she turned her heels again.

“For a guildmaster to go out personally, accompanied by personal guards no less, the situation must be dire indeed.” One of the young girl’s eyebrows twitched.

“Oh my, you have a pretty sharp eye. To see through the fact that these aren’t adventurers, but my personal guards. Very well, since I bear some responsibility for canceling the talk so abruptly, I’ll at least tell you the reason. Let’s talk outside.” Elizabeth jerked her chin towards the entrance, then walked off with brisk steps.

Shouzou and Sofie exchanged glances, then followed along behind.

There were carriages readied outside. Elizabeth’s carriage was a large one, with four horses hitched to it. The personal guards got in one by one as Elizabeth turned toward Shouzou and company.

“Right now, I need to go to Arashuan Cave.” Seeing Shouzou tilting his head blankly, Sofie offered explanation.

“Arashuan Cave is located in the mountains on the other side of the nearby river. It’s a lair for magic beasts, so normally no one goes near it, but.....”

“How do you not know that?” Elizabeth shot a look of astonishment at Shouzou. But then she shrugged her shoulders and moved on.

“We received a quest from the government to investigate that cave. We entrusted the quest to an adventurer party, but we haven’t heard back from them, and the check-in date has passed. So now we

have to at least confirm whether they've died or abandoned the job and run away."

"Is that something that the guildmaster should personally take care of?"

"Well I can't very well make my staff do something so dangerous. Normally, I only send my personal guards, but it's close and I'm also a magic user myself. Though, the quest giver keeps pestering me, so a major part of the reason I'm going is to keep up appearances." Having finished saying what she wanted to say, Elizabeth fluttered her hands in a "shoo, shoo" motion while turning on her heels.

"Excuse me, can we have a few more moments?" Shouzou called her back in a hurry. What he had just heard seemed to have tugged at something in his mind.

"What? I'm in a hurry, in case I haven't made that clear." Not bothered in the slightest at the eye the young girl was giving him, Shouzou said quite suddenly—

"May I accompany you?"

"You? Why?"

"I've already cleared my schedule for the entire day to talk to you. It might come across as rude, but I honestly don't really have anything else to do."

"Unnn....." Elizabeth stared hard at Shouzou.

"True to the rumors, you do have an impressive build. But don't expect any help from us if you get attacked by a magic beast, all right?"

"Not a problem. I can take care of myself."

"Then why not, I suppose." Elizabeth gestured toward the back of a carriage. Hidden behind the large carriage was a smaller box carriage drawn by only two horses.

"M-Me too! I'm coming along too!" Sofie yelled suddenly.

"Suit yourself." said Elizabeth without even turning around.

Thus, Shouzou and Sofie ended up boarding one of Elizabeth's carriages.



A short while later found the two carriages proceeding through the wilderness, after having crossed the large river that flowed south of the city with the help of a ferry.

"So then? Did you guys want to complain to me or something?" Inside the box carriage, Shouzou and Sofie were seated across from Elizabeth.

"Complain?"

"After all, we were the very first to copy your idea of abolishing the deposit."

“We have no reason to complain about that, though.”

“Great! Though even if you did complain, I had every intention of feigning ignorance, *ahaha*.” Elizabeth laughed with a carefree air.

“So what is it then? If it’s about sharing quests, then I’m going to kick you two off right here and now.”



“No, that is not it. But, before that.” Shouzou’s eyes turned sharp.

“What were the adventurers who took on this quest like?”

“What? That’s a pretty random thing to ask. Erm, I didn’t meet them personally, but apparently they were a wandering party.”

“Wandering?”

“They were a party not originally based in Treia. Maybe they were from the royal capital, and they stopped by Treia to pick up a side job to earn some cash?” Among such adventurers, there were rather reprehensible ones, though they were rare. If they determined the job to be too difficult to complete, they would just nonchalantly return to their base city without reporting it to the guild.

Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders after explaining.

“I see. Incidentally, this was a quest issued by the government, was it not?”

“Yes, it was. It had been a while since the last time the government sent us a quest, so I was actually quite fired up about it. Though this was a wandering party, all of the members were Silver-ranked, so my staff also thought it would be fine. Clearly, we made a mistake.” Goldas Adventurer’s Guild, the city’s largest, had almost a complete monopoly over quests issued by the government.

It was rare for these jobs to be passed down to the second and third largest guilds. Elizabeth’s guild—Shining Eagle Adventurer’s Guild—was considered mid-tier in the city, being ranked fourth or fifth. Quests from the government don’t come very often.

“I see. Which means—” Shouzou’s voice turned slightly frosty as he continued.

“We should turn back right this second.” Elizabeth frowned dubiously. However, his next words caused her blue eyes to immediately fill with rage.

“You’ve been taken for a ride, Caroque-san.”

“What..... did you say?”

“A government job that comes once in a blue moon got accepted by wandering adventurers. Then they ghosted, and the quest giver insistently pushes you toward the lair of magic beasts ‘because it is your guild’s responsibility.’ Isn’t everything just too much of a coincidence?”

“?!” Wrinkles formed on Elizabeth’s brow as she began to tremble.

“You were the first one to adopt our method, as a guild sizable enough to be counted immediately behind the city’s top three. What would be seen as merely ‘last-ditch resistance’ from a bottom feeder such as ourselves, probably looked like a real threat in their eyes when it came from a guild like yours.”

“Th-That’s horrible!” In place of the dumbfounded Elizabeth, it

was Sofie who leapt up in an outburst. The sudden rocking of the carriage almost made Shouzou fall over.

“S-Sorry.” After prompting the red-faced Sofie to sit down, Shouzou turned toward Elizabeth again.

“This is just a possibility. Even if my deduction is spot on, I don’t think they expected you to make the trip personally, what with your status as both a noble and as guildmaster.” In all likelihood, their plan was to mar the reputation of Shining Eagle Adventurer’s Guild. If the forces they sent for confirmation’s sake ended up being repelled by magic beasts, then they would have been made a laughingstock for sure.

“Either way, before heading into dangerous territory, it would be wise to first clarify the identities and backgrounds of these adventurers. How about we turn back to do that first?” In order to not come across as threatening, Shouzou tried to offer his opinion in as close to gentle persuasion as he could manage. However.....

“No. I will continue on toward Arashuan Cave.” Elizabeth poured resolve into her words.

“But you two, you should get off now.” She turned to order the coachman to stop, but Shouzou interrupted her with a question.

“May I hear the reasoning behind this show of stubbornness?”

“This is not a show of stubbornness. You said it yourself, did you not? That this is but a mere possibility. Time spent on investigating the adventurers would undeniably be time lost. That is why, at the very least, I need to confirm whether or not they arrived at the destination in the first place.”

It is a rule that adventurers are to report to the guild promptly when they find themselves unable to complete a quest.

However, on the off chance that they end up unable to deliver this report, they are to leave behind something predetermined that is to serve as an indicator. This was a customary practice between adventurers and guilds. Of course, one main reason for doing so was to maintain their relationship with the guilds. However, this was also partly for the adventurers’ own sake. Being an adventurer means constantly courting danger. Dying due to unfortunate circumstances is not a rare occurrence at all. As such, for the sake of their own honor, adventurers constantly take measures against being unjustly accused of running away after accepting a quest.

“It’s also a possibility they were attacked by magic beasts and died. As long as there is even the slightest sliver of that possibility, I am duty-bound to go confirm it. For the sake of their honor. This is part of my duty as a guildmaster.” There wasn’t even the slightest quiver in her eyes. Her resolve appeared unshakeable.

(I see. She is indeed stubborn. But she isn’t as unreasonable as I was

led to believe.) Elizabeth had within her a core, a conviction that ran throughout her whole self. It was surely her firm refusal to nod in acquiescence toward anything that deviated from that conviction that caused those around her to mistakenly see her as someone who was unreasonable.

“In that case, we will continue accompanying you.”

“Come again?”

“After all, our schedule is still open.”

“.....Do as you please.” Even Shouzou could not bring up the topic of a buyout within this atmosphere.

Afterward, up until they arrived at the cave, the inside of the box carriage was merely filled with silence.



Arashuan Cave is a deep cave with an opening randomly in the middle of a forest located in a valley.

Several species of medium-sized animal-type magic beasts lived in it, and it was said that there were undead-type magic beasts farther in the depths of the cave.

“There it is.” On the wall right beside the cave entrance was a mark carved by knife. It was a symbol: a horizontal line within a circle. That was indeed the symbol that had been agreed upon beforehand with the party in question.

“This means that, at the very least, they did reach the entrance.”

“Indeed. Then there should be more markers on the walls as they proceeded with the investigation.”

“Are we going to confirm them all?”

“Goodness, no. If so, then it would be no different from us doing the investigating ourselves. We just need to find a few of them, that should be enough to protect their honor. We don’t even have to confirm whether they are dead or alive.” Saying that, Elizabeth stepped into the cave first.

“Onigawara-san, are we going to be all right.....?” Sofie clutched Shouzou’s clothes anxiously.

“According to the soldiers, the magic beasts that live here rest quite deep inside the cave during daytime. But still, I wonder.....” Shouzou followed after Elizabeth, an uneasy feeling within his chest.

The entrance to the cave was roughly a semicircle 5 meters in radius, with the width narrowing slightly inside.

After proceeding a while, they came upon an open space.

The walls were lined with fluorescent moss which emitted a pale green light that, when combined with the red of their torches, painted a fantastical scene indeed.

“I don’t see any more of the signs.” A quick glance at the wall

revealed no more of the agreed upon symbol.

And then—

“It appears that you were indeed right about them taking me for a ride.” Elizabeth spat from the center of the circle formed by her guards.

“Lady Elizabeth, this.....” One of the guards could not help but to blurt out in fear. “.....is not a joke. For something like this to even be here.....” The target of her glare was a quivering red mass that looked almost transparent.

In this world, these magic beasts were called slimes. From those that reached Shouzou’s waist, to those that were nearly his full height, slimes of varying sizes had them completely surrounded.

“Are these magic beasts dangerous?”

“You really don’t know anything, do you. Slimes are impervious to physical attacks. Bringing along experienced swordsmen in expectation of beast-types and undead-types has now come back to bite me in the behind.” It was common sense in this world that slimes are to be countered with magic. They were especially weak against fire. They seemed cautious of the torch fire at the moment, as they merely closed the encirclement without doing anything else.

On the other hand, more and more of them appeared from within the depths of the cave, gathering on the other side as if to purposely cut off their path of retreat.

“The situation is only going to get worse and worse if we stay here. I’m going to wipe out a portion to secure a path of retreat. When the path opens, run as fast as you can.” Immediately after giving out orders, Elizabeth began murmuring strange-sounding words.

The soldiers all lowered their stances.

Eventually, she abruptly stopped chanting, and the soldiers positioned in the direction they came from slid sideways. The next instant—

“Blazing Scatter Shot, Adros Fire!” Elizabeth shouted and thrust out her hands, from which innumerable little clumps of fire shot out.

The force would seem a bit lacking if compared to a machine gun volley. However, the moment a clump of fire touched a slime, the force of the flames grew in strength. The slimes wriggled in pain, grinding themselves against the walls of the cave in a bid to put out the fire.

And then, a path did open up, just as Elizabeth had planned.

“RUN!” Even before the command, the soldiers had already begun dashing off. The soldiers holding torches did their best to keep the slimes at bay even while guiding Shouzou and Sofie through.

They made it through the encirclement, and were hurrying toward the exit.

Elizabeth was bringing up the rear, still chanting magic to release toward their pursuers.

However, while running with Sofie in his arms, Shouzou turned around and came to a realization.

“Nn? Oi, you guys. Aren’t you all going a bit too fast?” The experienced soldiers were indeed fast on their feet. Either due to the fear of having to face enemies on which physical attacks do not work, or something else entirely, the distance between the soldiers and Elizabeth was gradually widening.

Just when Shouzou was about to stop.....

“?!” The silent cry had come from Elizabeth.

Several meters away from her, something red and half-transparent was falling down in globs from the cave ceiling. The globs quickly gathered together on the ground, until the overall viscous mass became so large that it completely sealed off the cave passage.

“This can’t be happening..... For even a King Slime to show up.....?” Her tone was born of despair, yet it turned into a roar the next instant. “You all get out of the cave! I’ll break through by myself!” Several of the soldiers, who had stopped to look back, jumped as if shocked and resumed running off. Everyone was heading toward the exit.

Elizabeth resumed chanting.

“Blazing Scatter Shot!” And there was the volley of fire again. Upon contact with the gigantic slime, the flames began burning with even greater ferocity.

However—

“Kyah?!” The King Slime had shot off the parts that were burning.

Elizabeth found herself being assaulted by viscous clumps that were still burning. Her small frame was sent flying, and she landed on her butt.

Due to most of the force having dissipated in the explosion that occurred upon impact, and the fact that the fires were all limited in size to begin with, the flames quickly died out. But now, Elizabeth was covered head to toe in innumerable globs of viscous slime.

“Uh, ah, nooo.....” Elizabeth struggled to tear the pieces off, but they began to converge towards her wrists, ankles, and waist, as if to immobilize her.

The main body was also moving. With slithering motions, the gigantic mass gradually drew toward the young girl.

“O-Onigawara-san.....?” While paying attention to Sofie, who was wrapped around his waist, Shouzou lowered his body and dropped his stance.

“Wait, what are you doing? That’s..... not magic, right? Physical attacks don’t work on this thing! So get away quickly, while you still

can!" Even while cowering from terror, Elizabeth cried for Shouzou to save himself.

"It's just my nature, you see. Unless I test it out myself, I can never quite feel satisfied." He quietly sucked in a breath, then gently breathed out.

While doing so, he clenched his right fist, then lightly thrust it out.

BOOM!

The fist that he shot out compressed the air in front of it, after which the compressed air shot forward as a mass.

With a low *pop*, a huge hole was bored through the King Slime's body.

Both Elizabeth and Sofie's eyes widened in astonishment.

However, their astonishment was quickly overwritten by disappointment.

The hole in the slime's body was closing back up even as they watched.

Seeing that—

"I see. So just one punch is not enough. In that case..." Facing toward the slime directly, Shouzou dropped into a stance, then he clenched his left fist as well.

"URARARARARARA!!" Shouzou began punching with both his fists in succession.

The flurry of blows that were so fast as to be beyond capture by the naked eye caused the air in front of him to become so thin that a wind was generated as air rushed in front of the cave entrance.

The slime's upper half was reduced to nothingness at a visible rate.

"Caroque-san, please drop to the ground."

"Hi, hiii....." Elizabeth clutched her head and fell prostrate on the ground.

After confirming this, Shouzou lowered his center of gravity even further and proceeded to blow away the remainder of the slime.

Eventually, the slime was whittled down to ankle height, upon which it changed to a blue color and began slithering off into the depths of the cave.

As it passed by Elizabeth, it dragged off the parts previously plastered onto her body, and then fled deeper and deeper. Very soon, its figure could not be seen any longer.

"Can you stand?" With Sofie in one arm, whose hips had given way, Shouzou offered Elizabeth his other hand. While looking up at Shouzou in a daze, words unwittingly fell from Elizabeth's mouth.

"Who..... are you.....?"

"Who, me? I'm just your average guild employee."

“Yeah, as if.....”

Her weak-sounding tsukkomi reverberated softly in the cave.



“So that’s what it was. You wanted to buy us out entirely.” On the way back, inside the carriage, Shouzou finally brought up the talk about the buyout.

He had originally thought to come again another day, but Elizabeth insistently pestered him to divulge his true intention for the day’s visit, so he felt he had no other choice.

“Well, that’s what I thought, but I’ve since changed my mind.”

“And why is that?”

“I am now aware that some of the information that we had on you was mistaken.”

Shining Eagle Adventurer’s Guild was a guild operated by the Caroque family mostly as a pastime. The family head, Count Caroque, had left his only daughter in charge of the guild as a way for her to learn more about society. Due to that, his daughter had free rein, and thus Shouzou assumed that she would not have that much attachment to the guild. Following that train of thought, he had thought optimistically that the smoothness of the discussion would hinge mainly on how much he offered.

However, her every word and action overflowed with love toward her guild and her adventurers. She also had a strong sense of responsibility, and most likely was not the type who would abandon something halfway through.

“Well, you made the right call. It didn’t matter how much money you piled onto the table, I have no intention whatsoever of letting go of my guild. Even if I owed the other party my life.”

“Neither did I intend to indebt you to me. I have also determined it impossible to buy the guild from you. And so—”

Shouzou leaned forward, clearly enunciating his next words.

“What do you think about a merger?”

“Mer... ger.....?”

“To put it in extremely simple terms, to take two guilds and make them into a single one. That’s all it is.”

“Now I think you’ve over-simplified it.....”

“Thinking in terms of our two guilds’ relative sizes, a merger on equal footing might cause some doubts to arise. I’m sure both sides have things that they will not yield on. However, what we can offer is sales methods that no one’s ever used before, as well as know-how in regards to administra—”

“What did you mean by ‘things they will not yield on’?”

“The biggest examples would probably be deciding who will be

the guildmaster and what the name of the guild will be, I imagine. In addition to those two, would you be willing to meet with our guildmaster to discuss all the relevant details with a positive consideration?"

"Sure, all right."

"Seriously?!" Elizabeth's seemingly casual reply caused Sofie to raise her voice in surprise.

"Leaving the difficult parts aside, merging means getting Shouzou to work for me, right? I find that an extremely tempting offer. But don't misunderstand. I haven't agreed to the merger yet. All I'm saying is that I'm willing to come to the table for the discussion."

"That is all that I'm asking." Shouzou patted his chest down in relief.

However, Sofie murmured softly with a difficult face.

"I... really don't want my father's name..... to disappear....."

"So does that mean your side is not willing to yield on the guild name?"

"Eh? Um... that's, no I mean..... My aunt has been protecting our guild this entire time. If she steps down from being guildmaster....."

"You're quite greedy, aren't you."

"Uuu, sorry....."

"What I won't yield on is the position of guildmaster. The guild name is, well, it wasn't even me who decided ours in the first place, so I don't care at all."

"You don't care at all?"

"Which means the issue boils down to who would be the guildmaster, yes?" While receiving her probing gaze, Shouzou thought he could almost see it already.

The sight of Adora throwing up both hands shouting "I have no more responsibilities!" while dancing a jig—

In actuality, when he brought news of the discussion back to the guild, Adora did raise both her hands and dance a jig. She didn't want to manage a guild to begin with. But with that said, her talent as a manager specialized in protecting was something that could shine only in a position of responsibility.

As a result of the ensuing negotiations, it was decided that the guild name would be Elunheine Adventurer's Guild, while Elizabeth Caroque would be the Guildmaster. Adora would then support her in the role of consultant.

And thus, the renewed Elunheine Adventurer's Guild was born—

Chapter 7: Dragon Slayer

“““““Welcome~♪”””””

Shining Eagle Adventurer's Guild, now newly renamed Elunheine Adventurer's Guild, opened its counter at half past nine every morning, earlier than all the other guilds. All of the receptionists greeted the adventurers with bright smiles and energetic voices.

It had now been a month since the merger between the two guilds was decided.

The pushing forward of their opening time. The warm atmosphere and this reception. Partly also thanks to several other new measures that they had adopted, this already well-positioned property along the main avenue was now bustling with adventurers day after day. In addition to the reception counters that had been increased to seven in total, at the other end of the right hand side of the reception floor was a booth that was partitioned off.

“As I was saying, this one is impossible for you guys~” Inside, the cat-eared beastkin Moko was in the middle of handling a male adventurer.

"I'm begging you, please make an exception for us!" The young adventurer bowed so deeply that he was grinding his forehead into the table between them. "I really want to take a big job and become Gold-ranked. Come on, please. Please let me take this job. I mean, it's even written here that Silvers can take it!"

“But dear customer, our staff has determined that it’s impossible for you~” Moko waved the quest poster in the air.

The way this guild worked was that adventurers who wanted to accept a quest would first be evaluated by the guild on their aptitude and ability for the completion of the quest in question. Then, and only after then, would they entrust the quest to the applying adventurer. Cases that a general reception counter couldn't handle would then be diverted to the separated consultation booth.

Back when the deposit fee was still a common practice, the guild would earn money even if an accepted quest was not completed. Due to that, evaluating and selecting adventurers for quests almost never happened. However, raising the completion rate of the guild tied directly to the guild's income. That was why Shouzou set up this consultation booth very early on.

The person in charge for the consultation booth today was Moko,

and behind her, Lalaine was muttering away as usual.

Shouzou approached, then lightly lifted the quest poster out of Moko's hand.

From her hidden position behind him, Sofie also popped her head out to look at the quest poster.

"Subjugation of a dark dragon, I see. We've handled these previously by gathering Silver class adventurers in a support role in accompaniment to a military squad, haven't we? What's the problem here?"

"The problem is, this isn't a quest for accompanying a military squad. In the first place, this quest wasn't issued by the government, but by an association of traveling merchants. The main focus of this quest is only to investigate the movements of the magic beast in question, but I see here that the quest giver also included a line asking the quest receiver to subjugate it if possible." The reward amount would shoot up in the case of subjugation. That was the reason why the man had every intention of subjugating the dark dragon.

"If this was a quest to defeat a dark dragon without the military, then forget Gold, it would be ranked Platinum."

Adventurers were ranked. Depending on their strength and accomplishments, they were ranked Platinum, Gold, Silver, Copper, or Iron.

Adventurers in the top rank of Platinum were those who truly lived up to the phrase "worth a thousand men." At the moment, there were only seven officially acknowledged within the kingdom.

Shouzou abruptly brought his face near the man's.

"We are also running a business here. We cannot entrust a quest to someone if we know it will be too difficult for them to complete." The man withered under the pressure from Shouzou. However, anger and discontent swirled within his eyes.

Without missing a beat, Sofie followed up after Shouzou.

"By being impatient and taking on a large job in the hopes of getting an achievement under your belt, it's your own life that you're putting at risk. I've heard that even the famous Ketora siblings suffered such serious wounds during their latest dragon subjugation quest that they are still recuperating even now and cannot take on any jobs." It was her way of softly hinting that this was a difficult job even for the siblings in question, who were Platinum adventurers.

"Tch, I get it already....." In contrast to his words, the man still looked entirely unconvinced as he walked out.

"I've never seen him before. Is he a wanderer, or someone who newly chose to base in Treia?"

"I see that his strength is beyond Silver, but his hotbloodedness is a definite issue, hmm."

“You could tell how strong he was?”

“This is true for magic beasts too, but adventurers also have a unique ‘aura.’ Based on that, I can generally gauge their strength. Though I admit that I haven’t a clue about magic capacity and all that.” Shouzou took a closer look at the quest poster in his hand.

“Well, guess I’ll go with this one for today.”

“Ah, so you’re really going for that one.....” Sofie dropped her shoulders in resignation.

“So Lalaine-san, you will be coming along too.”

“Oni-occhan, you’re going out again?” Shouzou grinned while answering Moko’s question.

“Yep, just popping out to take a peek at what these so-called dragons look like.”



In order to properly determine who can successfully complete which quest, it was necessary to be familiar with not only the adventurers, but also the quests’ contents. A large portion of the quests handled by an adventurer’s guild were related to magic beasts in some way. Having come to this world only recently, Shouzou did not know much about magic beasts.

That was why, after setting up the consultation booth, Shouzou had been occasionally going out to observe magic beasts. Focusing mainly on the kinds that come up most frequently in quests, he would personally go watch magic beasts in their natural habitats.

“Hmm, quite tough indeed. Not only that, every single piece is quite sharp, too. Rather than calling them scales, it might be more correct to call this an armor of sharp blades.”

In the hilly area situated west of Treia. Several species of dragons lived there.

After arriving by running even faster than a horse, Shouzou had immediately found a huge dragon and was patting it all over.

The dragon covered in reddish brown scales was paying him no mind, carrying on with basking in the sun on a rock.

A dragon could obliterate an entire town in a rampage, and thus were considered cataclysmic-level magic beasts. However, they were generally mild in nature, and also possessed high intelligence.

Their main diet was trees. But with that said, in spite of their gigantic builds, they were extremely small eaters. A single tree could last them several days. The source of their energy was magic, which they take in from forest spirits through the trees that they eat.

The above was Lalaine’s commentary, but Shouzou understood almost none of it.

“Onigawara-san, please don’t stimulate it too much. This is a red

dragon, its temperament is more rowdy than other species, and it can get very violent at times.”

Sofie was watching on from a distance, with her heart in her mouth. Beside her was Lalaine, who was lying on the ground. She had been carried by Shouzou the entire way, but even merely being carried had been enough to zap all the stamina that she had.

“It seems that as long as I don’t direct hostile intentions against it, it doesn’t pay me any mind.” Shouzou continued patting it all over.

“Um, that’s..... H-How about we have lunch soon?” Unable to bear it any longer, Sofie voiced the suggestion in a bid to get Shouzou to step away from the dragon.

“Oh, is it that time already?” It seemed that he had been so engrossed with the dragon that he had forgotten the time.

With a single bound, Shouzou returned to where Sofie was to take a rest.

While eating, Shouzou shared his honest opinion.

“It’s nigh impossible for a normal human to defeat that thing. At the very least, the young man that we were talking to before we set off, he wouldn’t have been able to leave even a single wound.”

“Dragons are generally considered something you should stay away from. They are even the objects of worship in some areas. It is only Platinum class adventurers—and even so, sometimes compatibility makes a huge difference—that can fight with them on equal footing. Among them is even one incredible enough to have been granted the title of Dragonslayer from the king personally.”

“Interesting. ‘Dragonslayer,’ you say? That sure is an impressive-sounding title.”

“Even magic doesn’t work well on them, so there is nobody who specializes in killing dragons. But apparently the Dragonslayer has good compatibility against dragons, so as he continued completing quests related to dragons, somewhere along the way he just happened to earn the title.”

“I see. And you say that a dark dragon is even more powerful than the one sleeping over there?”

“Yes it is. A bigger one could even take on several dragons of a different species at the same time. In addition, they are extremely belligerent, and would attack anything that makes the mistake of going near them.”

And apparently there was one such dark dragon currently roaming around the area.

It was a distance away from the highway, but a certain merchant caravan had gotten attacked last month. That was what led to this subjugation quest being posted at the adventurer’s guilds in the royal capital and Treia.

“To be honest, I would have preferred to see this dark dragon myself.”

“If you do that, then we would effectively be doing the investigation quest ourselves, so.....” It seemed that Sofie was not fond of the idea at all.

As they were finishing with lunch, and Shouzou was pondering over what to do next while looking at the two girls who seemed like they very much wanted to just go home, a loud rumble reached them through the ground.

From far away, what sounded like a huge creature’s roar also reverberated.

The red dragon, who was still in the middle of its afternoon nap, lifted its head to look toward the direction of the roar. After baring its teeth warily for a while, it noisily flapped its wings and flew in the opposite direction with a cry.

“Wh-What could it be.....?”

“No idea. So let’s take a look.”

“*Fue?!*”

“No.....”

Shouzou began running over, with the two under his arms.

At the boundary between the rocky field and a forest, two gigantic dragons were fighting each other.

No, to be more specific, the match had already been decided.

The one lying on its side was a dragon with blue scales, and there was a large wound on its neck. It was no longer breathing.

Standing over it was another dragon.

It was clad in scales so black it seemed to radiate malevolence. Towering one size larger than the blue dragon, this was undoubtedly the dark dragon that was the target of the quest in question.

Lalaine whispered, “It’s eating its own kind.....” Her voice was trembling.

“Are there other dragons that eat their own kind?”

Lalaine nodded reservedly.

Most dragons have a diet of trees, within which forest spirits deposit the magic that they need as sustenance. However, there are those that eat other living creatures for their magic.

This was especially true for the violent and belligerent dark dragons, among which there were several individuals well known for this specific tendency.

“But, it’s weird..... Blue dragons are the most friendly kind, but they are next to dark dragons in strength. From the looks of things, it seems like this was pretty one-sided.....?” Lalaine tilted her head.

“More importantly, let’s get out of here already, Onigawara-san.....” Sofie’s face was pale from the alarming scene.

Interfering with the dark dragon would equate to taking on the quest. Guild staff were forbidden from undertaking quests.

A single glance was enough to determine the black dragon's strength.

It was indeed true that there was no point in staying any longer.

Shouzou moved to carry Sofie and Lalaine while remaining unnoticed, but..... "Wait, that is....." He noticed a small figure beside the dead blue dragon. It was not a human. It was a blue dragon the size of a human child.

"Is that the blue dragon's whelp? So its parent was killed in front of its eyes....." Sofie also noticed it. With her hands clasped over her mouth, she looked to be on the verge of tears at the realization.

—*Gugah!*

The black dragon roared. Its golden eyes rolled to look straight at the young blue dragon. The youngling was pressed tightly against its parent, trembling violently. The dark dragon opened its huge mouth wide, then lunged forward to assault the unmoving whelp. In addition to draining its magic, it seemed like it intended to swallow the small figure in a single gulp.

Survival of the fittest was a natural law. Not to mention that direct interaction with the dark dragon could very well be construed as a violation of the laws.

"But those are mere trivialities!!"

The parent dragon was most likely killed while trying to protect its child. Then there was the whelp, trembling with fear while pressing itself against its departed parent. As a father, there was no way he could just overlook this.

BOOM!

"ONIGAWARA-SAAAAAA~~~~N?!" Shouzou kicked off the ground, leaping toward the dark dragon. Then he slapped the dragon's maw with incredible force.

Right after a deafening sound, the dark dragon began tilting over. Its gigantic figure toppled to the ground, causing an enormous tremor upon impact.

"Hm?" Shouzou suddenly noticed something gleaming near its black neck.

It was a sword.

A beautiful, shining, double-edged longsword had been stabbed into the dark dragon's neck.

Shouzou held onto the black dragon's neck, then pulled out the longsword.

The dragon tried to get back up, so he took a huge leap backward, landing right next to the whelp.

He and the black dragon glared at each other for several tens of

seconds.

The one who moved first was the dark dragon.

It flapped its jet black wings. Then its huge body gently floated up.

After rising to around 20 meters high, the glaring contest resumed.

However, the black dragon eventually flapped its wings again, then disappeared between some mountains.

“Onigawara-san, doing something crazy again.....” Sofie trotted over. Lalaine tried to follow, but ran out of stamina halfway and sank to the ground.

“*Gue!*” With a short cry, the blue dragon’s child also flapped its wings and flew up. After taking one last, long stare at its parent, it then slipped away into the forest.

While picking the wheezing Lalaine up, Shouzou posed a question to her.

“What’s going to happen to that baby dragon now?”

“.....When they’re young, they receive magic from their parents so they can grow. So, probably.....”

Without sustenance, it would most likely die.

It stung that they couldn’t take it under their protection.

“That dark dragon will probably show up again.” Though according to Lalaine, because it had sucked magic from another dragon, it would probably stay put for 10 days or so. After saying that, she seemingly ran out of stamina completely, as all strength left her body.

“Still, that magic beast was indeed quite large and strong. The merchant caravans would never be safe again until it is subjugated. Sofie-san, what area is the Dragonslayer normally active in?”

“The royal capital, if I remember correctly. I’ve also heard mention of a few past visits to Treia too. The Dragonslayer never visited our guild, but maybe Elizabeth-san knows more.”

“Hmm. Well then, let’s go back to the guild first.” Shouzou looked toward the forest.

With painful reluctance, he lifted up the two girls, then returned back to their base.



Immediately after returning to the guild, Shouzou went straight to the guildmaster’s office.

He reported the details of what had happened to Elizabeth, who was lolling about on the sofa meant for receiving guests.

“This is honestly my first time hearing someone talk about slapping a dragon so hard it fell over.” Elizabeth gave her opinion

with confounded amazement while fiddling with her golden ringlet curls.

Shouzou shot a glance at the naked longsword dangling from his belt, then sighed heavily.

"It seems that a lot just fell into place. To put it clearly, I think subjugating that dark dragon is going to be extremely difficult."

"Even for the Dragonslayer?"

"This is unconfirmed information, but the Dragonslayer might actually be dead."

"Eh?" cried Sofie in surprise.

"Did you hear about the really large dragon subjugation a little while back?" asked Elizabeth.

"Yes I did. The one where the Platinum-ranked Ketora siblings lost too, right?"

"That's the one. It was a military campaign to subjugate a dragon that had been rampaging on the kingdom's southern border. As for the Ketora siblings, I heard that the older sister got hurt pretty bad. But that's not all."

The Dragonslayer in question had joined the fight a bit later.

With defeat thick in the air, for the sake of protecting the Ketora siblings and the wounded soldiers, he had remained in the battlefield, all by himself.

"It's not like I saw it with my own eyes, but apparently his strength was on par with that of the dark dragon. After all, he is a dragonewt, a dragonkin within whom the blood of the dragons flows. There is no one with better compatibility against dragons than him. But—" Elizabeth continued, revealing the unexpected twist that had happened during the subjugation.

"There were actually two of them. Two huge dark dragons." Caught in the middle between a turf war between two enormous dragons, the military force was almost obliterated. That was why even the renowned Platinum class was caught off guard. Amidst the confusion, by the time the straggling survivors finally managed to make it back to the capital, for a while even the whereabouts of the Ketora siblings could not be confirmed. And after that, no one ever saw the Dragonslayer again.

"That's why it's rumored that he might be dead....." Elizabeth jabbed a finger towards the sword on Shouzou's waist. "That actually belongs to him. In all likelihood, the dark dragon that you lot encountered was one from back then. After losing the turf war, it probably wandered to this area, I'd guess." For a swordsman to let go of his beloved sword, something truly staggering must have occurred indeed.

The most likely possibility was that he was no longer of this

world.

“It seems that the Ketora siblings have recovered, so if we want to find someone to complete this quest, it would be them. But.....”

“Where are they right now?”

“In the first place, they were the type to explore the world and wander all over. Their original base was a foreign country on the other side of a sea, so they might have gone back already.”

“Are there no other candidates?”

“More like, I think it is now clear that this is a case that the military needs to move on. This is not something that can be handled with less than ten Gold class adventurers working together in an organized manner.” In the first place, the quest issued by the merchant caravan only asked for an investigation.

It was so that, once information of an extremely dangerous dark dragon rampaging about was confirmed, that information could be taken to the government so the country could deal with it.

“In that vein, the quest could be considered completed with Shouzou’s eyewitness testimony. But that would be a violation of the law..... But that said, keeping quiet about it would leave a bad taste in my mouth. Do you think ‘our guild staff just happened to bump into it’ would fly with them? Sounds like I’ll have to make that excuse work.” Elizabeth burned with an enigmatic sense of purpose.

“.....”

“I’m going to say this just in case, but please spare me from ‘a staff member of an adventurer’s guild just happened to bump into the dark dragon and accidentally defeated it,’ all right? There’s no way I can talk myself out of that one. And if that were to continue, it wouldn’t be only us, money flow would go haywire in the entire industry.”

“.....There’s really no easy way out of this, is there.”

“Seriously, why oh why didn’t Shouzou just become an adventurer?”

“It’s a bit too late for that. Anyways, let’s just deliver the eyewitness report to the public office without relating it to the quest. Then the government will surely issue a new quest for it.”

“A government quest..... do you think it would come to us?”

“The situation is quite an urgent one. The merchant caravan association may also change their quest into a subjugation one as well.”

“If we secure someone who could actually kill the dragon, then we might snap up the quest from the government, too. All right then. I’ll look into retracing the footsteps of the Ketora siblings. If they’re fully recovered, then there might be a chance.”

But in the end, just as Elizabeth had feared, the government-

issued quest did not come to their guild.

On the other hand, just as Shouzou had predicted, the quest from the merchant caravan did indeed change to “subjugate the black dragon,” which meant Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild still retained the right to make arrangements for handling that quest.

There was only a week left until the dark dragon resumed its activities.

During that time, the situation progressed with an unexpected development—



In the afternoon, as Shouzou returned from making his rounds outside, he found the reception area in an uproar.

“It’s my first time seeing Platinum adventurers.”

“But their appearance, it’s somewhat.....”

“Wasn’t it said that the older sister was quite the beauty?”

“It just means that you shouldn’t believe rumors after all.”

Shouzou accosted Moko, who was on reception duty, to explain the situation.

“The aforementioned Ketora siblings have arrived. Just now, they were brought to Eliza’s place. Oh right, Eliza did say that she wanted you to sit in on the meeting.” To think that the siblings that they had been looking for would come to them of their own accord.

Shouzou hurried toward the office. Along the way, he bumped into Sofie, who had been told to look for him, and so he stepped into the office together with her.

“How much longer are you going to make us wait? We are very busy people, you know.” The woman who was splayed over the guest sofa was complaining.

She had such a wide waist and was so fat that it looked like it would tire her out just to walk. Beside her was a tall, young man as thin as a bean sprout, who was scrunched over and gloomily staring at the ground.

Behind the two that were sitting on the sofa stood an unidentifiable person whose face was hidden under many layers of bandages. The stature and physique seemed to indicate a young man, but the balance of his head was off. It looked like he was wearing something on his head while still trying to mask his face.

“We apologize deeply for the long wait. This is Onigawara, our Head of Operations.” Elizabeth was sitting across from them, with a twitching smile on her face. She shot a sharp glare at Shouzou, as if ordering him to quickly go over.

After making his greetings, Shouzou sat down beside Elizabeth.

“These two are the famous Platinum-ranked adventurers known as

the Ketora siblings.”

“Have we confirmed their adventurer identification cards?”

“We took a look earlier. They were the real ones. Genuine Platinum class identification cards.” It was extremely difficult to forge an adventurer identification card.

This was all the more so for cards above Silver, as they have unique magic cast on them by court mages in the royal capital, which made them absolutely unique in the world.

After the quickly whispered conversation, Elizabeth turned back toward the pair.

“Ketora-sama, in regards to the dark dragon investigation and subjugation quest that we want to ask you to accept today—”

“Hmph, I haven’t said yet that we’ll accept it.”

“So you mean to say.....?”

“The target is a dark dragon, all right? You think we’re going to put our lives on the line for this puny reward?” The woman—the Ketora older sister—banged on the piece of paper left on the table. It was the quest poster.

“Go negotiate a higher reward with the quest issuer.”

“But that’s, uh.....”

“Before coming here, we visited another guild. At the moment, Goldas Adventurer’s Guild has promised us more than twice this amount, I’ll have you know.”

“Twice?! Is that true.....? That makes it an absolutely exorbitant amount.....”

“Hmph, we heard that you have a remarkable businessman here, but I guess he isn’t really all that after all.” The older sister laughed through her nose.

Elizabeth ground her teeth, but Shouzou held her back with his eyes.

“Ketora-san, we understand your request. However, the difficulty jumps up when investigation turns into subjugation. Have you fully recovered from your injury?”

“Whaaat? Are you saying that you don’t trust us?”

“I did hear that the dark dragon caught you off guard last time.”

“Hmph, the last time was because of the overlap of several unfortunate circumstances. The fact that there were two of them was indeed unexpected, but the military scrubs were also just too useless. They were completely in our way. But well, my younger brother’s injury wasn’t that bad anyways, so this time we can kill it easy, hands down.”

“Younger brother.....?” Elizabeth frowned suspiciously.

Once again, Shouzou held her back with his eyes, then continued the conversation.

“By the way, who is the person behind you? A new adventurer who joined your team?”

“Hah? Ahh, this one’s an apprentice. Not an adventurer, nope.”

“If you are to accept the quest, will you be bringing this person along? The rules forbid bringing along a non-adventurer, even with the accompaniment of a higher class adventurer.”

“This one’s just our luggage carrier. No fighting, so just going for part of the way shouldn’t be an issue, right?”

“In that case, then I shall be coming along as well as an overseer.”

“Haah? And who are you supposed to be? God, you guys are pushing all my buttons. Screw this. A place like this, we’ll be the ones to reject working with you.” The Ketora sister stood up in indignation. Rocking her heavy-looking frame back and forth, she began lumbering over to the exit. Her bean-sprout brother followed behind, and the young man with the face covered under bandages also left.

“You do know that these are fakes, right?” The three’s footsteps froze in midair. The first one who immediately whirled back around was the older sister, with her face completely red.

“You there, what did you just say?! Did you just call us fakes?!”

“And by extension, criminals as well. Identity theft through presenting another adventurer’s identification card as one’s own is a violation of the rules. Don’t think that you’ll be able to escape from this place. Seize them, make them spit out everything they know.”

“You—” Even faster than the fake Ketora sister could flare up, the masked young man kicked the ground. Closing the distance to Shouzou with a single leap, he drew the old sword on his waist.

Shouzou did not move.

The masked young man stood on the low table, holding the sword at Shouzou’s throat.

Shouzou didn’t even twitch an eyebrow.

“Fu, fuhahaha! You have a big mouth, but you’re not all that after all. You’re so frightened by a mere apprentice that you can’t even move!” Paying absolutely no mind to the woman laughing scornfully, Shouzou directed a sharp gaze toward the young man.

From a gap in the bandages, golden pupils returned his gaze.

“Do you seriously believe these two to be Platinum-ranked adventurers?”

“Please, do not speak.” It was the first time this young man spoke out loud. In addition to his small physique, his voice was a high-pitched one that clearly belonged to a boy before he hit puberty.

“I don’t get it. Why is someone of your strength following such insignificant people?”

“I said, do not speak.” His golden eyes quivered with doubt.

“Hmm. The circumstances remain unclear, but I see that you were

cooperating with them knowing full well who they were. In that case, then you deserve a bit of discipline.”

“What are you—?!” Shouzou grabbed the young man’s face with one of his large hands. Then he tightened his grip a little.

“*Guah!*” A grunt of pain leaked out as the young man let go of his sword.

The young man flailed his arms and legs as Shouzou slowly began lifting him.

“*Kuh*, let me go! This, dammit.....” The young man punched and kicked Shouzou’s arm and stomach. A violent gust of wind began to rampage inside the room, to the point where the entire stone building began shaking under the force.

However, Shouzou did not even twitch.

The flabbergasted woman muttered in a trembling voice.

“Are you kidding me..... He is suppressing a Platinum class adventurer, with a single hand.....?!” With a start, she quickly clapped her hand over her mouth, but everyone present, Shouzou included, did not miss what she had just said.

“Hold on, what did you mean by ‘Platinum class adventurer’ just now? Did you mean him?” Elizabeth was about to press further, but Shouzou lifted his free hand to hold her back. At the same time, he let go of the young man.

The young man fell onto the low table on his butt.

The bandage covering his face loosened, revealing his eyes and almost everything below.

He had a face as cute as a girl’s. However, the eyes glaring up at Shouzou were razor sharp.

“I confess to not being familiar with how strong Platinum class adventurers are, but I can feel that you possess strength on par with the black dragon in question. With compatibility added to the equation, I can indeed see you managing to kill it.” Everyone else aside from Shouzou sucked in a sharp breath.

The sharpness in the young man’s eyes became replaced with befuddlement.

“You... know who I am.....?”

“I don’t know who you are. However—” Shouzou signaled Elizabeth with his eyes.

She immediately went over to the young man, and removed the bandages from his head.

On the young man’s forehead was a pair of horns, one on each side.



“A dragonkin..... Are you not Sidorias Geolta, otherwise known as ‘the Dragonslayer?’”

The young man looked at Elizabeth uneasily. “I... do not know..... Is... my name Sidorias.....?”

“Memory loss, I see. In that case, then it would be faster to ask a person who knows.” Shouzou cracked his knuckles. “As I said before, we are going to make you spit out every single thing that you know.” His towering figure gradually filled the eyes of the fake Ketora siblings



One and a half months earlier.

In order to subjugate a dark dragon that had been rampaging near the kingdom’s southern border, the military was called into action.

They were the best of the best, and even had the Ketora siblings, both Platinum class adventurers, accompanying them.

However, what they found upon arriving at the reported location was completely beyond what they had expected: two black dragons fighting each other for territory.

The subjugation force got caught up in that fight, and was almost obliterated. The Ketora siblings also suffered severe injuries while trying to help the soldiers.

The younger brother entrusted his older sister with the soldiers and fought alone, but by then he was already suffering from extensive wounds. The wounds were not as deep as they looked, but his stamina was whittled down, and he was in very dire straits.

At that moment, the young man known as the Dragonslayer, Sidorias Geolta, appeared gallantly, just in the nick of time. He faced off against both black dragons in order to allow the Ketora siblings and soldiers to evacuate. Upon confirming that everyone had managed to escape, he too tried to slip away.

However, the moment he stabbed his sword into the neck of one of the dark dragons, he was caught off guard. He received an attack from the other one. Sidorias slammed into the ground and hit his head so hard he lost consciousness. With the interloper out of the way, the two black dragons resumed fighting each other.

Fortunately, the two’s fight gradually led them away, so Sidorias remained unscathed despite having been unconscious. Then a certain pair came upon the scene. It was the brother and sister pair who had been Sidorias’s guides.

The two of them had approached Sidorias with the intention of stealing materials from the black dragon after the subjugation was over. They just happened to find the luggage that the real Ketora

siblings had dropped, which was how they got their hands on the siblings' identification cards. Then they took Sidorias, who had lost his memory due to the head trauma, under their protection and deceived him into obeying them.

Their plan was to pretend to be the Ketora siblings and score big on a large job before Sidorias recovered his memory.

It was at that time that they heard about the dark dragon quest. They intended to have Sidorias kill the dragon, and then wrangle the reward money out of him afterward.

With the fake Ketora siblings in custody, Shouzou turned toward Sidorias.

"Were you cooperating with these two despite knowing they were being dishonest?"

"Some things did strike me as strange. But—"

We are Platinum class adventurers.

But due to our injuries, we can't exert our full strength.

Until we recover fully, you can do our work for us.

"The way I saw it was, these two did save my life. I had no reason to refuse them." Having lost his memory, thus not even remembering the laws of the adventurers, he had no other recourse but to take these two's words at face value.

"In that case, then you were just a victim who was deceived and used. You probably will not be charged for any crimes." Shouzou continued, "And so, Sidorias-kun, would you be willing to accept the quest to subjugate the dark dragon?"

"Me, sir.....? But I've lost my adventurer identification card....." Shouzou glared frostily at the fake Ketora siblings, causing the fake elder sister to speak out fearfully.

"We already sold it on the black market ages ago." A grimace came over Elizabeth's face.

"Which means we'll have to treat it as a lost-and-reissue case. It takes a lot of time, that process. It would be much faster to just register all anew." This was not forbidden by law. Adventurers had ranks, which they climb through accumulating achievements. No one was crazy enough to start over again from scratch on purpose.

"However, the quest got changed into a subjugation one. We can't offer the quest to anyone under Gold rank."

"I know, I know. I was just throwing the idea out there. In any case, it seems that relying on him for this quest is no longer viable. We must locate the real Ketora siblings as quickly as possible." But there was no way of knowing whether they would make it in time before the dark dragon resumed its activities a week later.

"Is it really that difficult to re-issue an identification card?"

"Pretty much. Things always become more complicated when the

government is involved.” Shouzou pressed to hear the exact details of the process.

“Firstly, the guild that the adventurer registered at needs to confirm with the adventurer in person. In this case, this step is already an issue. After all, the adventurer in question has lost his memories.”

“Hardly an issue. What comes after that?”

“Eh, I think it’s a pretty large issue..... But all right, let’s set that aside. The adventurer is to be questioned on the detailed circumstances in which he/she lost the identification card, then write up an application at said guild. That application then needs to be taken to the Central Public Office, where they will inspect and evaluate the request. This, too, normally takes several days. The reason why it takes that long is because the people over at the Central Public Office will only process it in between their usual duties. In addition, there is no guarantee that a single application would suffice. They commonly nitpick on extremely trivial issues and then send the application back to the guild. When that happens, the adventurer needs to be questioned once again. Then the whole process is repeated again and again.”

“Hmm. And when the application finally passes inspection?”

“Then they finally begin making the adventurer’s new identification card. They have to call in a court mage, and the process takes an entire day. For what it’s worth, this is the last step. But if there is no court mage available, several more days of wait time might get added to the process.” Apparently, if one’s luck is bad, it might take an entire month to go from the start of the process to actually getting the new identification card.

After hearing it all, Shouzou took a while to organize everything inside his head. “All right. Then let’s immediately begin the process for re-issuance. Based on what you said, the shortest it can take is three days.” As everyone else stared on with jaws dropped, he clapped a hand on the young man’s shoulder.

“Well then, Sidorias-kun. To start with, let’s get your memory back.”

“Hah?”

“I know someone who’s extremely well-versed in magic. I’m sure she’ll be able to take care of it if we ask her.” Shouzou then turned his attention from the stupefied young man to Elizabeth.

“Ahh, which reminds me. President, our priority this time is the subjugation of the dark dragon within a week’s time. Depending on what happens, we might not earn any profit from this job. Is that all right?”

“Eh? Y-Yes, well, it can’t be helped, I suppose. I’ll leave it up to you, then.”

Shouzou nodded in acknowledgment, then left the office—



“I remember everything now! And what’s more, my body feels extremely light!” The young man beside himself with excitement standing by the porch of the Onigawara house was none other than Sidorias.

“Now there’s no way I would lose against that dragon.” Not only was his memory returned to him, but all the wounds that had yet to fully recover had been completely mended. He felt himself absolutely overflowing with strength.

“Sorry about this, Silvia. I wouldn’t waste your time if I could help it, but there was no other way.”

“Don’t worry about it. Something of this level is nothing at all. Now, if his head had been smashed open and there were fragments of his skull stabbed into his brain, that would have been a bit more troublesome.” Let alone “a bit more troublesome,” Sidorias shuddered thinking about how powerless even the most legendary of sages would be when faced with such a situation.

“With this, we no longer have a problem with the confirmation and personal report portions of the process. Now, let’s make our way to the guild that you registered with.” As it turned out, the guild that Sidorias had registered with was in the royal capital.

Jumping into a carriage immediately meant they would make it to the capital by nightfall. However...

“Are we going to run? Again?”

“It shouldn’t take too long with your running speed, right?”

“I mean, yes, but.....” Sidorias was a Platinum rank adventurer. He was faster than any horse by a long shot. So then, who was this large man, who easily kept up with him without even breaking a sweat? What about the woman who used healing magic that exceeded what any great sage could perform? Right after recovering his memory, Sidorias immediately found himself doubting what he had previously known as common sense.

Upon arriving at the royal capital, the two of them practically flew to the guild they were headed for. The reception lobby went dead silent for a brief instant. Then the very next second, deafening cheers roared out.

Because Sidorias had returned alive and well.

Guild staff who knew him rushed over, bursting with joy. Other adventurers also gathered around, bombarding him with questions.

Shouzou stood a distance away, observing it all.

The scale of this guild was slightly smaller than the current size of Elunheine. Even so, he had heard from Sidorias beforehand that this

was the third largest guild in the capital. In this country, the industry of adventurers was booming. However, the center of it all was at Treia. Despite having a larger population, the number of guilds in the capital was actually lower than there was in Treia.

It was at this moment that a stout, middle-aged man with dignity appeared. Drawing near while shaking his sizable body, he took Sidorias's hands into his own.

"Ohhh, Sidorias-kun. You are alive! We have all been so worried."

"Tohno-san, I'm sorry for having made you worry. To be honest with you, I've come today to ask something of you."

"Is there something bothering you? Well, let's not stand and talk. Come on inside." The man, who Sidorias had called Tohno, was the guildmaster of this guild.

(Well, that saves us the trouble of calling him out.) In order to get an adventurer identification card, there was an unavoidable hurdle that had to be overcome.

It was not sufficient to fill out an application to a public office. Ensuring smooth cooperation with the guild was also of great importance, as it would be their only line of communication with the public office, which was the greatest hurdle in the process.

Shouzou wasted no time in taking out a namecard and proffering it to Tohno.

"Excuse me, may I sit in as well?"

"Hm? You are.....?! Elunheine! From Treia..... Which makes you the rumored....." Tohno's eyes widened upon seeing the namecard. His jolly atmosphere flipped to wariness in a split second.

Sidorias covered for him in a fluster.

"He saved my life. That's also part of what I'm going to tell you." Tohno acquiesced, albeit with his brows still wrinkled.

After passing through to the parlor and taking a seat on the sofa, Sidorias first explained everything that had happened thus far.

"—And so, that's how I recovered my lost memory." Tohno, who had been listening intently with his arms folded, exhaled a long breath.

"What an atrocious thing to do, impersonating the Ketora siblings. And they even took advantage of you when you had lost your memory..... So, the something that you wanted to ask of me, is it to help with arranging for a re-issue of your adventurer identification card?"

"Yes. I'm aware that what I'm asking is a tall order. Is there any way to make it happen within a week?" Tohno once again exhaled a long breath.

"Of course we will start the application process for you. But the limit of one week is really quite tight. The case of the black dragon

has become a big deal here in the capital as well, and everyone is scrambling about making preparations for the subjugation. The Central Public Office has been affected as well.”

“It is for the sake of subjugating that very same dark dragon that I need this adventurer identification card.”

“I am well aware. With you having made a full recovery, I believe that you won’t let a single black dragon get the better of you. But you see, the guys over in the Central Public Office don’t think so. When they read the details in the application, they will want to confirm several times whether you are truly recovered or not.” Sidorias hung his head and bit his lip.

Tohno frowned while continuing.

“It’s not that they have any ill intentions either. If they allowed re-issues that easily, then adventurers might begin to take their identification cards less seriously. And the case this time is one that calls for even more due diligence. Platinum adventurers are very precious. Even though you’ve just returned, if you were to be done in again, there would be a huge uproar indeed.”

“I’m not sure whether I should be happy or not about being the target of this kind of concern.....”

“It’s something you’re just going to have to come to terms with. I, too, don’t want to lose an excellent adventurer who can complete high difficulty quests with certainty,” said Tohno, who then turned to glare at Shouzou.

Shouzou took it straight on wordlessly, his mind whirling at top speed.

There wasn’t a single lie in what Tohno had said. And that was why it was easy to get a read on his character. Here and there sprinkled throughout his matter-of-fact business talk were words overflowing with kindness. If he truly thought of Sidorias only as a means to an end, then he would have stayed silent. Surely he was also sincerely worried for Sidorias.

The scene that immediately ensued upon Sidorias’s return to the guild came back to mind. There were both guild staff and adventurers who looked happy from the bottom of their hearts at Sidorias’s return. His simple and earnest nature was surely a large reason for why he was so revered, but in this guild was also a sense of solidarity not found anywhere else.

(In which case, bargaining would be the wrong thing to do here.)
Shouzou opened his mouth quietly.

“Tohno-san, would you please consider cooperating with us? We are aware that it would take time for a new identification card to be re-issued, and that the biggest delay in the process is the public office taking its time with the processing. I want to do something about

this.”

“Were you listening to me? I am against him going to subjugate the black dragon.”

“I guarantee you that Sidorias-kun has had a full recovery. Even he himself has said that he can carry out this subjugation.” Sidorias nodded several times in agreement.

However, Tohno shook his head.

“Is there some reason why we have to go to such lengths to make this happen? If it’s just one dragon, then the military can take care of it. In actuality, they are already in the middle of making the preparations to do so.”

“Very true, the military would likely be able to kill the dragon. However, fighting as a group means it would be that much easier for casualties to occur. And on the off chance that our predictions are off and the black dragon returns to being active earlier, then casualties among the general populace would also occur.” Tohno crossed his hands and drew his brows together into a frown.

“I understand what you are worried about. You are wary of me deceiving Sidorias-kun with the intention of taking advantage of him, is that correct?”

“I won’t let you say that you have no such intentions. If he succeeds in subjugating the black dragon, what your guild stands to gain is enormous. Naturally, I don’t intend on reproaching you for it. Guilds are not charities. Rather, if you say that you don’t have bad intentions, it would make me unable to trust you.” Returning Tohno’s sharp gaze, Shouzou replied plainly.

“I have absolutely no intention of taking advantage of Sidorias-kun.” It was not only Tohno whose jaw dropped with astonishment, but Sidorias’s did too.

“.....What just happened? Did I not just say that I won’t be able to trust you any longer if you claim to have no such intentions?”

“Yes you did. However, it is my judgment that now is a moment to speak plainly.” Shouzou continued to reveal his true intentions without hiding anything.

“I saw the black dragon in question with my own two eyes. It was in the middle of attacking a blue dragon that was protecting its child.” Tohno gasped.

“As I said just now, there’s no way of knowing how many casualties would arise if we leave that thing alone. That is exactly why I want to ask this of Sidorias-kun. At this point, we don’t care about the guild’s profit anymore. That is why—” Shouzou made sure to properly enunciate his next words.

“Sidorias-kun, you should accept the quest from this guild instead.” Tohno’s eyes grew as wide as saucers.

“W-Wait a moment. That would effectively mean we would be stealing all the profit!” Shouzou tilted his head in puzzlement.

“I know Sidorias is not exclusive, but it’s clear to see how deep his ties with this guild run. I don’t think there’d be anyone who’d object.”

“I myself wouldn’t be able to live with it. I have no intention of stealing anything from the person who saved Sidorias-kun’s life.” Shouzou could not help but smile wryly. He, in fact, had not considered the possibility that his suggestion would be declined. Apparently, this person had a much greater sense of responsibility than expected.

“My apologies. Where he accepts the quest should be entirely up to Sidorias-kun himself. I don’t want to make this into an issue. For now, we just want your help so that the public office can finish the process within the time constraint.” Instead of answering, Tohno turned toward Sidorias questioningly.

“Are you sure that your body is fine?”

“Absolutely. There is no chance of me losing if it’s one on one. This time for sure, I will end it.”

Feeling the extraordinary resolve in those words, Tohno flashed a smile. However, almost immediately after that, he cast his eyes down with a crestfallen look.

“I’ll help, then. But there’s not much I can do..... Sending it back quickly when the public office pesters me for something related is all I can really do. I’m afraid that unnecessarily provoking them would only cause the number of back and forths to go up.”

“The way I see it, that back and forth is the main problem.”

“You want to make the application pass in one go? Now *that’s* impossible.” Tohno had already gone over all the reasons why that wouldn’t work.

“No, it is indeed possible. After all, the aim is to make them understand the fact that Sidorias-kun has made a full recovery, and to take care not to undermine the value of the identification cards.”

“How are you going to do that?” Tohno leaned forward eagerly. Sidorias also swallowed a mouthful of saliva audibly.

“We will have Sidorias-kun go submit the application in person.” Shouzou continued.

“In other words, the aim is to eliminate the back and forth. Any questions the public office has, they can just ask him right there and then.”

“I get your logic. However, if they allow this, then it would be opening the floodgates for copycats. There’s no way the public office would allow this.”

“This time, there is the very urgent looming threat of the black dragon. We will use that. As a Platinum rank adventurer, he is beside

himself with worry, unable to contain himself much longer. If we spread this narrative to the general public, then it would make it easier for the public office to label this as a ‘special exception.’” To be entirely honest, Shouzou expected copycats to appear anyway. However, it was his opinion that a system that required so much back and forth was better off being abolished anyways.

But leaving that aside, their best recourse at the moment was indeed to storm the place in person. Everything after that would be up to negotiation.

“So how can we help with that?” asked Tohno.

“The actual process of applying is something between a guild and a public office. We don’t want to break any more laws than necessary. To that end, we would need a staff member from your guild to come along with us. We will visit them under the guise of your guild going to submit the application in person, with Sidorias-kun simply tagging along.” Here, Shouzou’s eyes turned sharp.

“Of course, I will also be coming along. Leave all the negotiating to me.” Tohno crossed his arms.....

“No, I’m afraid not.” He shook his head.

The unexpected refusal caught Shouzou completely off guard.

“I will carry out the negotiations myself. At the end of the day, you are a staff member from another guild, an outsider, to be blunt. Under normal circumstances, you are not someone who would be involved. We don’t want to break any more laws than necessary, right?”

“That’s..... you’ve got me.” Shouzou could not help but smile wryly.

Tohno continued with a mischievous grin. “Assuming that the application itself goes smoothly, there is still the possibility of something going wrong during the making of the identification card itself. I will also pull some strings to secure a court mage. Despite how I look, I do have some influence with the Senate councilmen.” Shouzou had originally intended to ask Elizabeth to take care of that, in light of her noble lineage, but Tohno had beat him to the punch on this as well.

Trying to accomplish everything by yourself would eventually lead to a breakdown.

Which is why Shouzou lowered his head deeply.

“Thank you very much. I entrust it all to you.” He chose to believe in this person, believe that this person could actually pull it off—

Tohno ended up pulling every string he could and did absolutely everything in his power, such that a brand new Platinum rank adventurer identification card found its way to Sidorias’s hand a mere three days later. After making all the necessary preparations, Sidorias

promptly set off, and successfully subjugated the dark dragon within the day.

And clutched in his hand was the naked longsword that proved, beyond any room for doubt, that he was indeed the famous Dragonslayer—

Side Story 3: The Three Sisters' Adventure

Amidst the shower of dazzling sunlight, the three sisters and their mother, Silvia, were out playing in the forest near their house. With lunchboxes in hand and a picnic on the itinerary, the children were almost beside themselves with excitement.

"Kana-onee-sama, there's a... there's a Dragonfly-sama~!" Hina was practically shouting. On the tip of a branch jutting out from the shrubbery rested a dragonfly.

Kana smoothly closed in, then *catch*! Faster than the eye could see, she had the dragonfly's wings sandwiched between her fingers.

"*Fufun*. Haven't my dragonfly catching skills gone up quite a bit?" Kana gently pinched the dragonfly's wings with her fingers, then held it up proudly in front of Hina.

"Poor Dragonfly-sama~"

"Wait, what? Weren't you asking me to catch it for you just now?"

"Hina-sama never said that at all~"

"Ehhhh....."

However, she seemed to have thought of something, and a mischievous grin came over her face.

She gently brought the dragonfly toward Hina's chest. The dragonfly clung to Hina's clothes with a firm grip.

"Whaddaya think?"

"This is..... a nametag, a Dragonfly-sama nametag~!" The dragonfly was hanging onto Hina's clothes with its wings spread. Apparently, it made Hina think of a nametag from kindergarten.

"Yuna-onee-sama, look, look~!" Hina could not help but to twirl around with joy. However, perhaps surprised by the motion, the dragonfly flew off high into the sky.

"Please don't run away~!" Hina began making little hops as she chased after it. Kana followed behind her leisurely.

"I'm going to catch it and carve 'Hina-sama' on it~"

"You're going to carve it, huh. Isn't that going to kill it?" Tiny kids sometimes say the cruelest things with a straight face.

"More like, didn't you say 'Poor Dragonfly-sama' just now?"

"That was that, this is this... is what people say~"

"Well, I guess people do that say that a lot. And by 'people,' I mean Hinacchi."

“It went that way~!” Hina elegantly ignored the sarcasm, then rushed by right in front of Yuna.

“Hina-chan?!” Upon which she dove right into a shrub. The violent rustling emanating from within the shrub continued for a while, until it abruptly stopped.

“A~ha~ha, Hinacchi and her curiosity—”

“Is this any time to be laughing?! She’s going to get lost!” The eldest daughter was in a terrible fluster. Despite hesitating at the sharp-looking branches, she also walked into the shrub, heading deeper into the verdant forest in search of Hina.

Although the number of shrubs decreased as she pressed on, in their place were many, many gigantic trees, such that the forest almost seemed like a maze.

Then along came Kana, who cleared the whole shrub in a single leap.

“Kana, haven’t your physical abilities kind of exceeded those of a normal elementary school kid lately?”

“You think so? But don’t people say that kids who live in the rural areas just have more stamina?” Yuna tilted her head, wondering if that was enough to explain what she thought she was seeing.

“Anyways, she’s nowhere to be seen. Yuna-nee, let’s split up.”

“Eh, that’s not a good idea—Kana?! Wait a mome— wait for me.....” Before Yuna could stop her, Kana was already running off with incredible speed.

Yuna was left standing *all* by herself.

This was deep within a forest overgrown with foliage. Despite it being the afternoon on a day with clear skies, the area was dim and gloomy.

The cry of a bird echoed. What had sounded enjoyable and cute just moments earlier now felt strangely ominous.

“H-Hina-chan.....”

“Kana.....” She could not bring herself to raise her voice. What if she shouted and it brought over some ferocious beast? Her dad Shouzou had supposedly already threatened all the carnivores originally in this area into fleeing, so she’d like to think that she’d be fine, but she still couldn’t help cowering with apprehension.

The thought of going back to call her mother did cross her mind, but that would mean turning her back on her two sisters, and she couldn’t bring herself to do such a thing. Hina, especially, was still young. It would be awful if she tripped and hurt herself.

Yuna examined the ground near her feet carefully. The bare dirt was wet, and thus there might be footprints left on it.

After walking a while through terrain made treacherous by plenty of protruding roots, she finally found what she thought were possibly

Hina's footprints.

Upon tracking them, she found herself at another shrub.

After making her way through with lots of rustling, "Hii?!" Her feet froze with fear. She had discovered a living creature that she had never seen before.

(A big..... lizard.....?) The creature had a long neck, and its entire body was covered by pale blue scales.

Compared to its neck, its torso looked quite big. It was curled up at the moment, but looked to be roughly the size of a big dog. Yuna noticed with a second look that there were also what looked like wings on the creature's back.

Is this a creature unique to this other world? It was at this point that she finally realized the figure of her youngest sister right beside the creature, trying to peer into its face.

"Hina-chan, it's dangerous, come this way!"

"Yuna-onee-sama, it is hurting." Hina's brows were all scrunched up together, and she looked very concerned.

Yuna timidly made her way over, then crouched beside Hina.

The creature had its eyes closed, and was breathing erratically through its half-opened mouth.

"Is it... sick.....?" If that was the case, then there was the danger that they might catch whatever it had.

"How about we go find Mom first?"

"But it looks like it's hurting so much....." Hina patted the creature near its neck. The place where she touched it seemed to glow for a split second.

Chomp.

"Hi-Hi-Hi-HINA-CHAAAANN?!" The creature had suddenly lifted its head and bitten Hina's hand.

"Ahaha, that tickles~" However, Hina merely giggled, and did not seem to be in pain at all.

"Are... are you okay?"

"It's biting me, but it doesn't hurt." True enough, the way the creature was moving its mouth seemed very similar to a baby suckling milk. After a while, the creature finally let Hina's hand go.

Its breathing was no longer erratic, and its skin color sort of looked like it had improved.

"I think it was hungry."

"But we didn't give it anything though?" Yuna tilted her head. But the creature softly cried "*Kueh*" as if to affirm what Hina had said.

Perhaps attracted by that sound, "Oh, Hinacchi spotted. Aww, Yuna-nee beat me to—what is THAT?!"

The noisy one showed up.

"Isn't this a dragon? It's tiny, though."

“This is a Dragon-sama~?”

“I guess, it sorta feels like it? Mama will probably know, how about we ask her?” After saying that, Kana barreled off as if the awful footing was no issue..... then returned while pulling their mother’s hand.

“Ah, this is a blue dragon baby. The word for it is a ‘whelp.’” Silvia confirmed nonchalantly.

“A Baby-sama~? The same as Hina-sama~!”

“It might be lost. I don’t sense its parent anywhere nearby.....” Their mother cupped her cheek with a hand, thinking out loud, “What should we do with it?”

To which Hina energetically replied, “Let’s keep it at home~!”

“Hinacchi, that’s a brilliant idea.”

“Eh, seriously? I’m not so good with reptiles though.....” While listening to her children’s opinions, Silvia recalled what Shouzou had told her before.

About how in the mountainous area in the west, there was a blue dragon that was killed by a dark dragon. And how there had been a dragon whelp that had run off right after being saved by Shouzou. Maybe it had followed Shouzou’s scent, or maybe it had been simply attracted to a powerful source of magic.

If the whelp before their eyes was truly the one from that time...

“This child might have lost its parents already. Let’s bring it back home for now, and talk with Daddy about it?”

““Sure~♪”” The younger sisters jumped with joy. Yuna, despite being slightly bad with reptiles, was also secretly thinking *maybe it’s actually kind of cute* and so did not say anything in protest.

That night. With a single look, Shouzou knew the whelp to be the one from that time. Dragon whelps cannot live without receiving magic from their parents. Luckily, in the Onigawara household, there was a Grade 1 goddess who could feed it magic. Furthermore—

“Eat up~” Out in the yard, where they were keeping the baby dragon, there was Hina, with her hand outstretched.



With a *nom*, the baby dragon bit her hand and began suckling gently.

Silvia watched on with tender eyes.

“Hina-chan, it’s bad to give it too much magic, so feed it in moderation, okay?”

“Okay~!” Hina patted the dragon’s snout, then withdrew her hand.

“If you eat too much, your tummy will hurt~?” The baby dragon lowered its neck dejectedly while staring at Hina’s hand wistfully—

Chapter 8: Their Greatest Enemy Moves

On a certain clear day, Sofie was visiting a large material store all by herself.

“Blois-san, thank you very much!” She bowed her head with such vigor that her small, round glasses seemed at risk of falling off.

“Thank you too, for personally coming over every time. It’s a great help, really.” Normally, when registering a quest, the quest giver is the one who is supposed to go over to the guild.

On his very first day, Shouzou had come to the store in person, but this was something that was very rarely done. Or rather, it was seen as a shameful thing to do, so guilds actively avoided directly pitching sales to stores.

However, this trend was currently changing. The reason was because Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild had adopted this practice of actively making rounds in person to gather quests in order to make themselves stand out from other guilds, and it was working.

“And Sofie-chan, now you’re even allowed to do sales all by yourself. Good for you!”

“Thank you. I might still be insufficient in many areas, but please continue taking care of me from now on.” Once more, Sofie bowed her head deeply.

Sofie’s task was done as soon as she got the quests, but she stayed a while longer to chat with the store owner. This was her putting into practice what Shouzou had taught her. Namely, that within seemingly aimless conversations, sometimes possibilities lurked that could connect them to more jobs.

“Which reminds me, Sofie-chan, I heard the news. You guys are trying to do something with Raulo, aren’t you?”

“*Fuee?*” The abrupt change in topic caused Sofie to become very flustered.

The Raulo that he brought up was undoubtedly in reference to Raulo Adventurer’s Guild. It was the city’s third largest adventurer’s guild.

Currently, Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild was in the middle of business talks with Raulo, intending to form a partnership with them.

It was the other side who had approached them first.

According to what Shouzou said, they had felt a fire lit under their

butts, and so were aiming to steal all the business strategies from Elunheine through this so-called “partnership.” However, Shouzou was plotting to use this against them instead, aiming to eventually absorb and annex them in order to make Elunheine big enough to approach Goldas—the city’s largest adventurer’s guild—in size and scale.

Sofie did not really understand all the probing and mutual outfoxing by those in management. However, what she did know was that this was not information that was supposed to be public.

“Umm, that’s... I’m.....”

“Ahh, I’m not trying to get inside information from you or anything like that. I mean, if Elunheine becomes even more successful, then I only stand to gain more. You guys have my support.”

“Oh, ohh. Thank you very much.” As expected of the owner of a store with history, apparently he knew quite a lot of things.

“But things are going to get tough from here on, eh? What with Marquis Goldas personally getting involved and all. It’s so rare to see that happen, isn’t it?”

“Eh?”

“Oh my, did you not know? What I heard was that the guildmaster of Goldas was going to be replaced, since it seems they’ve been outmaneuvered by Elunheine lately.” The head honcho of this city’s biggest adventurer’s guild was going to be replaced. If true, this was extremely huge news.

“Though well, I heard it from a guy who heard it from a guy, so even I’m not sure whether this information is real or not.”

“What kind of person will be taking over?”

“That’s the thing,” said the store owner in a quiet voice.

“Apparently it’s going to be the Marquis’s third son, Jirahal.”

Sofie blinked several times in shock, and then—

“EHHHHHHHH?!”

A cold shiver ran down her back as she cried out loud in dismay—

“Jirahal-san... *uuu...* that person, he’s coming back to town.....?”

Even after leaving the store, Sofie could not rid herself of her shivers.

However, it was but a rumor. It was not yet confirmed. While clutching onto that last straw of hope in her heart, and also clutching the quest posters to her chest, she took one step toward the guild to get back and get praised by Shouzou.

At that moment, a little girl ran in front of her. She was a cute girl with silver hair who looked to be around 5 years old. As she heartwarmingly watched the girl run off, suddenly, the little girl tripped and fell.

“A-Are you all right?” Sofie rushed over in a hurry and helped the girl get back up.

“No problem. This doesn’t even... hurt Hina-sama at all~” Blood was oozing out from the little girl’s knee, and she was putting up a strong front despite tears welling up in the corner of her eyes.

Sofie took out her handkerchief and gently applied it to the wound.

“Umm, where’s your mommy and daddy?”

“Otoo-sama is working and I can’t find Okaa-sama~”

“A lost child?!” Public order in the fortress city Treia was on the better side, but it was big enough that it would be quite time-consuming to look for someone.

It was common practice to bring lost children to the closest city guard station.

Sofie was about to do that when—

“Oh, Hinacchi spotted!” A high-pitched voice reached her ears.

A sizable distance away down the large avenue, a girl with short hair was pointing over their way.

“Kana-onee-sama!” The girl who called herself Hina stood up, then began waving her hands energetically toward the girl she called Kana.

Kana ran out onto the road toward her younger sister.

Just as she was making the crossing, looking so happy, so innocent, and so single minded, “Ah, look out!” A carriage pulled by two horses was bearing down on her from behind with incredible speed.

Of all things, Sofie’s cry of warning caused the girl, Kana, to stop dead in her tracks. Exactly in the path of the carriage.

Sofie could not even blink, much less look away, due to the sheer terror coursing through her body, such that she saw everything that happened in its entirety. The appalling scene of a girl mercilessly trampled and run over by a carriage—did not occur.

Without even looking back, Kana lightly jumped up. Up she went, higher than even the tall carriage. She did a back flip in midair while holding her knees to her chest, then landed back in the exact same spot as before, with both hands spread out.

During that time, the carriage had passed beneath Kana.

It was not only the surrounding passersby who were surprised. The two horses were also so startled that they reared up and whinnied. When the coachman finally managed to calm the horses down and make them stop, the carriage was right next to Sofie.

“Dammit, what happened...? Oh, look. Is that Sofie?” As Sofie watched on dazedly, a familiar yet very unwelcome voice reached her ears.

The door of the box carriage opened, and a young man appeared from within.

He was wearing a brand new suit made of high quality material, and had a very handsome face. Brushing up his golden-colored hair, he drew close to Sofie with a grin plastered on his face.

“Jirahal... san.....” The young man’s name was Jirahal Goldas. The very person who had come up in her conversation with the material store owner earlier.

“What were you thinking?! Have you forgotten the speed limit for carriages inside the city?!” To prevent traffic accidents, it was forbidden to run horses inside the city. The rule was to make them walk at a slow pace.

“I was in a hurry. Seriously, why did I have to go to the trouble of coming all the way here in person.....” After bitterly muttering to himself, he did a 180 and grinned at Sofie, before talking up a storm without paying any regard to her reaction.

“It’s been a bit more than two years, hasn’t it? You’ve become even more beautiful than before. Both your parents passed away, right? Yet I heard that you’re still working in the same guild as a mere assistant. If you’re having a tough time, I can take care of you. I can’t allow a demihuman to marry into the family, but there should be no problem with keeping you as a concubine.”

Sofie was struck completely speechless due to shock. She wasn’t one to easily hate anyone, but even she couldn’t muster any emotion other than disgust at Jirahal’s self-serving words.

“In any case, you’ll have to wait for another time to have a longer talk. I’m quite a busy man, but I can free up some time for you.”

“Jirahal-san, instead of that, I want you to apologize to that girl.” Sofie pointed toward Kana, who was bashfully being showered with applause and cheers.

“Me? Why?”

“Just now, your carriage almost ran her over!”

“Ahh, so that’s why the carriage..... Thanks to that, I hit my hip inside. Goodness, what a lack of common sense to walk in the middle of the road. I’m the one who deserves an apology here.” While still muttering to himself, Jirahal got back into the carriage, which then drove away.

Finally, Kana made it over.

“Hinacchi, you shouldn’t do that. Don’t just go off on your own like that.” Kana rubbed her younger sister’s head as if nothing had happened.

Sofie patted her chest in relief. With this, this child was no longer lost. Now, all that’s left to do is to bring these two to their parents.....

“Um, Kana-chan, right? Where are your parents?”

“Mm? Oh right. Speaking of which, where’s Mama and Yuna-nee?” As it turns out, the number of lost children had just increased to

two.

For now, she grabbed Hina's hand, then off they went toward the city guard station.

Thankfully, the closest station was right beside Central Plaza, which was the opposite of the direction that Jirahal took—



Shouzou found himself called to the guildmaster's office in order to handle a guest.

Adora, who was supposed to act as a consultant, was not present. Apparently, she had vanished immediately upon hearing the name of the guest.

The person who eventually was guided to the room was a superficial-looking young man with a middle-aged man in tow.

"Hey there, Eliza. It's been quite a while."

Elizabeth greeted him with a full-faced smile that Shouzou had never seen on her before.

"It has indeed been a while, Jirahal. If I could have helped it, I would have liked to never see you again."

"Hmph, I see you're still a woman who always has a word too many. Though I suppose that's one of the things that makes you so charming as well."

"And I see you're still as devoid of charm as ever. So, what? Did you fail at a business and get called back?"

"As if. I am returning in triumph."

"Guess you must have had a really capable person at your side, then." Elizabeth shot a look at the man standing behind him.

In spite of his medium build, the man had a very masculine face. His body clearly identified him as a man of the pen, yet his razor-sharp eyes gave him a close resemblance to a man of the sword.

He remained expressionless and reactionless.

"When used by me, almost anyone would seem capable." Without being bothered in the slightest, Jirahal plopped down onto the sofa for guests.

"You're going to let a commoner sit with us?" When Shouzou proffered his card while exchanging greetings, Jirahal made no attempt to even hide his displeasure.

Elizabeth and Shouzou sat across from him.

"So? Why did you come here? Showing up all of a sudden without prior notice. There's a limit to how rude someone can be."

"I'm also here unwillingly, under orders from my father. He said 'Go take a look at the faces of the people who will be your greatest opponents' or something stupid like that." One of Elizabeth's eyebrows twitched.

“So that rumor was real after all. I for one cannot understand how he could make someone like you the guildmaster.”

“Managing a guild is mere child’s play, right? In light of all my recent achievements, this is just my father’s way of telling me to chill and take it easy.”

“*Kuh...* who’s the one who always says a word too many? With you being the new guildmaster, it seems that the moment when we overcome Goldas Adventurer’s Guild is not as far off as I originally thought.” While looking on at the exchange between the two, Shouzou was genuinely impressed at how Elizabeth was managing to restrain herself to using sarcasm only, in light of how proudly she thinks of guild management.

Jirahal shrugged his shoulders.

“I’ll praise you for crawling up from the bottom with your eccentric ideas, but you are no match for me. From now on, you will act as befits your true station. If you want your guild to survive, that is.” Elizabeth glared daggers at him, but Shouzou actually found himself slightly impressed.



His arrogant manner was unpardonable, but the way he spoke with complete confidence was indeed one of the traits necessary for someone who stands above others as a leader. In other words, it could perhaps be said that he had talent at being a manager.

(It would make me happy if his appearance causes the industry to become invigorated. But.....) It needed not be said that that would depend very heavily on whether he truly had the ability to back up his words or not.

(Or otherwise, if he has a truly gifted aide by his side, as the President said.) Shouzou directed his eyes toward the middle-aged man. He decided silently that this man, who up till now had yet to even name himself, merited extra investigating.

Jirahal set his hands on the black tea prepared for him, insolently pronounced it “disgusting,” then began staring closely at Elizabeth with a smirk on his face.

“So, you haven’t grown much, have you?”

“I dare you to say that again, huh?” It was all too clear that Elizabeth was on the verge of exploding.

“Your beauty merits you some points, but your foul mouth, that’s a fatal fault. Neither do you have a body that guys would like, so I can imagine how troubled you are with finding someone who’d take you as a wife. What do you think about quitting this guild pastime and coming with me? Hey, that’s a pretty good idea, if I do say so myself. You come from nobility, so there’ll be no issues with your pedigree, at least. Personally speaking, I prefer women with a bit more chest and hip, but for the sake of appearances, I guess I can compromise a bit.”

By this time, Elizabeth had gone way past rage and into a state of mind colored with despondency and exasperated disbelief.

“Can you leave already? More like, leave.”

“Your foul mouth and temper, I will do you the favor of helping you correct them.” Shouzou almost thought he heard the sound of something snapping.

He laid a hand on Elizabeth’s shoulder, pressing her back into her seat right before she was about to lunge forward. At which—and who knows what came over her—she blurted out something outrageous.

“Hah, sucks to be you. Unlike your pitiful self, who no girl would willingly marry, I have someone that I’m actually in love with. Why do you think I let this man sit in on this meeting? This person is the one who will shoulder this guild one day, a man that I trust from the bottom of my heart!”

“O-Oi, what are y—”

“Isn’t. That. Right. Darling♪” She flashed a very beautiful smile, but her eyes were dead serious.

It didn't matter what he said now, none of it would mean anything.

Shouzou gave up, but still didn't want to play along with this farce, so he just ambiguously shifted his eyes away.

"This... man that looks more magic beast than man.....? To think that you've developed such peculiar tastes when I take my eyes off you for just a while." His mood soured abruptly, Jirahal stood up.

"Well, enjoy yourself while you still can. There's no way you can win against me anyways." Leaving behind this declaration of war, he finally exited the room. His companion nodded farewell before following after him. In the end, the man did not utter even a single word, let alone name himself.

Silence descended upon the office.

Elizabeth was hanging her head, with regret weighing upon her shoulders. However, she then gave her own face a sharp slap, before standing up with courage. "Well, you know, yeah." She had her arms crossed, and was avoiding meeting Shouzou's eyes. "I intend on choosing a man who can understand me as I currently am. I don't mind things like appearance or age difference. In that light, it's not like I won't consider you as a possible candidate—"

"I have a wife."

"Heh?"

"I also have three children."

"Hoh?"

The dumbfounded look on Elizabeth's face gradually gave way to a deeper and deeper shade of red.

"THIS IS MY FIRST TIME HEARING THIS!!"

"Oh right, I don't think I've told Adora and the others yet either." As someone with a personal policy of not letting his private life mix with work, Shouzou did not talk much about himself.

"What's wrong? Why are you on all fours?"

"I am currently wallowing in self-hate, so it would be great if you'd just leave me alone for a while....."

"Is... is that so....." Just as she asked, Shouzou quietly left the office, carefully making sure not to upset her any further—



The news of Goldas Adventurer's Guild getting a replacement guildmaster spread throughout the city within the day, evoking a certain amount of astonishment.

While some felt expectation and joy, those who knew Jirahal's character succumbed to unease.

The very next day after Jirahal's declaration of war, an issue had already cropped up at Elunheine Adventurer's Guild.

Gathered in the office was Elizabeth and Shouzou, as well as Adora in her role as consultant.

“Raulo Adventurer’s Guild are saying that they want to start anew on the partnership talks.”

“Even though they were the ones who approached us?” asked Shouzou.

“Yes. Though if I had to venture a guess, they probably got pressured by a certain place.”

“As if there would be anywhere else that would do such a thing other than Goldas’s idiot son’s place.” Adora spat her words out bitterly.

“Hmm. So that means Goldas is trying to swallow Raulo?”

“That’s not going to happen.” Elizabeth shot the idea down with certainty.

“Jirahal may crush his business rivals, but he’s not the kind of man to even consider taking rivals in.”

“Is that so. In that case, then we can just let Raulo do what they want.” This time, it was Shouzou’s turn to make a call with certainty.

“You sure? We had made quite a lot of progress with the talks.”

“Raulo came to us in the first place because they had ran out of options. Now that even Goldas has identified them as an enemy, it’s only a matter of time until they reach the end of their tether. When that time comes, we will kindly offer them a hand. We will be able to restart the talks with even better starting conditions than before.”

“You are pretty ruthless as well, aren’t you.” Despite feeling reassured, Elizabeth also felt a cold shiver run down her back.

However, several days later, another issue came up—



“Shouzou, do you have a moment?” Right before he was about to head out for his rounds, Shouzou got called back by Elizabeth.

Together with Adora, the three of them took a moment to gaze at the guild’s reception counters.

“It’s gone down quite a bit, hasn’t it.” Just as Elizabeth noted, the inside of the guild was a lot sparser than it had been a few days ago. The number of visiting adventurers had gone down quite significantly.

“That damn Jirahal, he’s sure pulled out the stops. To think that he’d go so far as to lower their commission.....” Recently, Goldas Adventurer’s Guild had taken to greatly reducing the commission retained by the guild upon the completion of quests.

The less they retained, the more the adventurer got to keep.

“Before, the line for our consultation booth stretched all the way over there,” lamented Adora.

“It’s only human nature, of course everyone’s going to go to the

place where they get more money.....” Elizabeth bit her lip.

“Hmm, the long lines. You’re right, I also think we need to do something about it as soon as possible.”

“Um, no, that’s not the problem here—”

“I get what you’re saying. However, what they’ve done is just sheer folly. There’s no need for worry.” He had already had this talk with Sofie way back.

The commission is something that is clearly stipulated in the rules, and is the guild’s deserved remuneration. The act of whittling it down would one day turn into a noose around their necks.

“But in actual fact, we are losing customers as we speak. If Goldas just waits for us to go out of business and then reverts the commission rate, then they’ll become the sole winners, won’t they?”

“This is indeed a good short-term strategy for a large guild with much more capital and stamina to cull medium or small-sized guilds. However, the middle to long-term damage is huge. President, if you were an adventurer and saw a guild changing its commission rates so frequently, how would you feel?”

“I’d feel disgruntled, I suppose. I’d be constantly afraid of them raising the rates much higher. I wouldn’t be able to trust them. Aha, I see what you’re getting at.”

Shouzou nodded deeply, then continued.

“There are very few people who interpret temporary advantage as good will. People will always make the best circumstance they remember, be it the past or the present, *the* standard to compare against. Dissatisfaction is extremely difficult to get rid of. In a city where the only guild remaining is one that adventurers cannot trust, then those who base in that city will decrease. If the number of adventurers who can complete quests decrease, then in the end, Goldas would also collapse.”

“But even so, we can’t just do nothing. Even if we put more resources into directly pitching to adventurers, if no one comes to our counters then we can’t handle all the quests we have on hand.”

“Mm, and so that is why—”

Elizabeth and Adora’s eyes glittered with expectation as they waited for Shouzou’s next words.

“We will set up more consultation booths.”

““Hahh?””

The first one who flared up was Adora.

“You, were you even listening to the conversation? The number of adventurers coming to our counters is DECREASING. Why on earth would we be increasing the number of booths?!”

“It was popular enough that long lines were forming. Having left this issue unresolved for so long was a mistake.”

“Isn’t it too late for that?” Elizabeth looked troubled.

Shouzou replied in an admonishing tone. “Adventurers complete quests to earn money. When they hear of another guild offering more reward money, naturally they will head over there. But you musn’t forget the most important thing. Reward money is something they can get only if they complete the quests.” Elizabeth and Adora came to a start. “The consultation booths in our guild perform the role of introducing quests to adventurers that match their ability and characteristics. That is what makes our high completion rate possible. They may dangle their small sum of money, but adventurers will only flock to them at the start. What we should be doing is expanding our services in order to adequately do what we’ve been doing all along—providing the added value of helping them ensure that they can complete the quests they accept.” The two nodded in understanding, but Elizabeth’s brows were still furrowed.

“But it’ll be hard to acquire the personnel we need for that. Wasn’t that the reason why Shouzou wasn’t able to address the long lines earlier?”

“We have enough people for the consultation booths. However, we don’t have enough people for the reception counters overall.” Those in charge of the normal reception counters were regularly reassigned to be in charge of the consultation booth on rotation. With Lalaine as support, due to her deep knowledge of the quest details and adventurers’ characteristics, there they would accumulate the know-how that they need.

However, if they increase the number of consultation booths, then there wouldn’t be enough personnel to man the reception counters.

Those at the reception counters needed to be capable of providing simple consulting, and also needed to have specialized knowledge regarding the characteristics of the quests currently in the market.

“Lucky for us, Goldas has helped us resolve this problem.”

“I don’t get it. Why would Goldas help us?”

“Going back to the thing from several days ago, Raulo is currently in a tough spot due to the pressure that Goldas is exerting on it.”

A flash of understanding crossed Elizabeth’s face, and she finished the thought for him.

“I get the main gist of it now. So we will be poaching Raulo’s staff. But we were in the middle of partnership talks with them just recently. To go from that to poaching their staff, how is that going to look.....”

“They betrayed our trust first. Don’t worry about it. Rather, their staff must be really worried for their livelihoods right now, so if you think of how we’d be effectively saving them, we would actually be the good guys. In the same blow, we would be weakening Raulo, and

thus hastening the schedule for the eventual absorption and merger.”

“What a brilliant way to turn Third Son’s schemes against him. You truly amaze me to no end.”

Shouzou wasted no time in getting down to headhunting—

Within a mere week, he managed to poach seven members of staff.

He didn’t only approach those who manned Raulo’s reception counters, but also others who were familiar with quests and adventurers, such that they now had more than enough manpower.

True to Shouzou’s prediction, the previous bustle had returned to the guild.

“But now there’s a big burden on Lalaine, isn’t there.”

“She is extremely shy around people, it’s true. But that’s where Moko-san is helping her out. More like, I think the burden on Moko-san is the bigger worry here.....” Moko was sociable with everyone new who joined, and also took on the role of translating for Lalaine.

“Or rather, that girl is just way too social, so I think she probably doesn’t even see it as a burden.” They looked over from afar.

“Nyahaha♪, I’m telling you, it’s fine~ That occhan might look scary, but he’s not going to bite—” Shouzou couldn’t help but smile wryly at Moko’s peals of laughter—

On the other hand, at the same time...

In the office of Goldas Adventurer’s Guild.

Surrounded by luxurious and gorgeous furnishings, Jirahal slammed his fist on his desk.

“What the fuck is going on?! Why are the adventurers going back to Elunheine?!”

The middle-aged man standing off to the side replied in a calm voice.

“The way the adventurers see it, at Elunheine they can earn exactly what they have as before, and also get introduced to quests that they can complete with certainty, so it is only natural that they would gather there.”

“Then we’ll copy that. The consultation booths or whatever. Set it up now. Make it double what they have.”

“As you say.” The man respectfully bowed his head without moving an eyebrow.

However, Jirahal’s plan quickly went awry.

The reason was that they could not perform appropriate matches between adventurers and quests. It could be said that this result was only natural, as they did not have the specialists who could do this.

In the end, people stopped using their consultation booths altogether.

Several days later, the sound of furious foot stomping could be

heard reverberating from the office of Goldas Adventurer's Guild—

Side Story 4: The Three Sisters' Encounter

During the afternoon on a certain day with clear skies.

After Hina woke up from her afternoon nap, a sudden announcement from Silvia sent all three sisters screaming with excitement.

“Let’s all go visit the city together.”

“Madam, what did you just—?!” The Grade 7 goddess Emalia was very surprised.

All the related departments had sent her repeated warnings of “Don’t interfere with the other world any more than absolutely necessary.” After Shouzou had started working, she had been receiving snide remarks every once in a while about it. Since she had been running about filing all the necessary regular reports, Emalia had been living every day with her stomach in terrible pain.

Silvia replied with a carefree smile, “To be honest, I’ve gotten so used to life on this side that I need some stimulation♪”

“How about cultivating aesthetic sensibility in your daughters? I’m sure that’d be very stimulating.” Emalia could wail as much as she wanted, but there was no way to overturn a decision that had already been set in stone.

“What should I wear?” asked Yuna, who had recently awakened to the concept of fashion.

“Will we get to meet any elves?” asked Kana, whose eyes were practically shining.

“Will there be Wolf-sama~?” asked Hina while jumping up and down like a bunny.

“Why wolves?” asked Kana.

“Where there are lots of people, Wolf-sama is there, and he tries to eat little kids, that’s what I learned~”

“Ohh, you’re talking about the ‘Beware of Strangers’ signs back in Japan. Hinacchi is very cute, so you’ve gotta be careful, okay?”

“I know what Wolf-sama looks like~!”

In this way, the three sisters finally got to visit fortress city Treia for the first time—

As their eyes were stolen by the sight of all the demihumans with animal ears walking along the stone-paved roads.....

“We’ve barely just got here and Hina-san is already gone?!?!”

Emalia's cry echoed throughout the avenue.

"That's terrible! I'll go look for her!" Kana dashed off with delight and in high spirits.

"Wait A-AAHHH?! Now that's two of them swallowed up and lost in the crowds....." Emalia clutched her head, but then pulled herself together, and pounded her gently sloping chest while declaring to Silvia, "Please leave this to me. You might not think it, but I'm actually quite good at tracking magic."

"Oh my. I thought you weren't going to use magic, though?"

"This is an emergency, and it's the kind of magic that is hard to notice at a glance." Emalia was burning with a sense of duty at finally having an opportunity to prove her usefulness.

"Well then, here I go." She clenched her eyes together and seemed to concentrate really hard on something, until she suddenly pointed in the direction that Kana had ran off in, declaring, "That way!"

As Silvia and Yuna watched on with incredulity, thinking to themselves "She went off that way, so isn't that a given already?" a cry that only brought them further unease rang out.

"Ahh?! I've lost them. There's too many people that the noise is just... which direction?!"

"Mom, is it all right to just leave things be?" Yuna's black eyes quivered with apprehension.

"I've already cast protective magic over both Kana and Hina that would activate if they are ever in danger, so there's no need to worry. This is the long-awaited trip to the city. I want to let them do whatever they want for a while longer." But that said, it would weigh on her conscience if her daughters caused anyone any trouble.

"But it's true that lately, both of them have started to awaken to their goddess powers. Especially Kana, she seems like she's being thrown around by her power, so I guess there is some cause for concern."

"Goddess... power.....?"

"That's right. Inside the three of you flows Mommy's blood, the blood of a goddess. Back when we were in Japan, Mommy suppressed it for you, but perhaps due to having been transmigrated to another world, it seems that it has awoken in all of you."

"So you mean, me too.....?" Yuna's uneasy gaze was returned by Silvia's cheerful, gentle one.

"That's right. I'm sure you've already noticed that something is off, haven't you? Lately, you've been studying all by yourself without needing Emalia-san's teaching at all, isn't that right? Haven't you already finished all the high school-level material?"

"Umm, well, yes....."

Unlike Kana, Yuna did not have superhuman physical abilities.

Unlike Hina, Yuna did not have powerful magic capabilities.

While feeling pride at watching her younger sisters' visible growth, she had also been feeling slightly lonely at seemingly having been left behind.

But as of late, even she had started to realize that something was strange.

She could remember any book perfectly by just reading it once. The abstract concepts in high school-level textbooks could also enter her head with no difficulty at all, and she could also read philosophical books and understand them fully.

Compared to her younger sisters, her ability might seem simple, but perhaps it was the perfect fit for her simple self.

"So then, let's get to looking for the three of them, shall we?"

"Oh, so we're treating Emalia-sensei as lost as well....." Yuna held onto her mother's hand tightly. It had been a very long time since she got to have her mother to herself. Her mother's hand was very soft and very warm.

The lost Kana and Hina met a certain young girl in the midst of a bit of a commotion.

"We'll now be going to one of the city guard stations, all right? By the way, I'm Sofie. Nice to meet you two." "I'm Kana~"

"I'm Hina-sama~"

"Um, yeah. I already knew that..... more like, you two sure are energetic." After a simple self-introduction of only names, Sofie headed down the main avenue while holding both Kana and Hina's hands.

"...Umm, how about let's properly look forward when walking? Why are you two staring at me?" Both Kana and Hina were looking up at Sofie.

"Your ears are so long~" Hina said in a somewhat wary tone.

"Y-Yes they are."

"Your eyes are big and bright~"

"A-Are they?"

"But your mouth, it's not big~"

"What?"

"Your hands are white, and your voice is not growly~"

"Umm.....?"

"Sofie-onee-sama is not a Wolf-sama~" Hina flashed her a relieved smile, to which Sofie could not help but to tilt her head in puzzlement.

"Hinacchi, she's what they call an 'elf.' Am I right?"

"Yes, I am. Is this your first time seeing one?"

"I have heard much about your kind."

"The boobies of all Elf-sama, are they all so big~?"

“Eh, I-I’m not so sure? I don’t think it’s everyone... more like, Kana-chan, everyone’s watching, please stop touching my chest.....” With both her hands occupied with pulling along the two sisters, Sofie was left with no way to protect herself from Kana’s sexual assault.

“It’s so soft.”

Hearing Kana’s review, Hina also reached out a hand.

“So soft..... But Okaa-sama’s are much, much bigger~”

Looking somewhat proud, Hina suddenly sniffed Sofie, before tilting her head.

“Otoo-sama’s smell~”

“Eh? Your daddy?” Sofie received quite the amount of damage at the fact that instead of smelling sweetly like a mother, she apparently smelled of a middle-aged man. Within her depression, she tried to explain it away to herself by pegging it up to her just being kind of sweaty from making today’s rounds.

Within this harmonious (?) atmosphere, the three of them walked on.

“There you two are!” An energetic beautiful lady showed up with such speed that she might’ve whittled down the stone pavement with the soles of her shoes.

“Hina-san, you can’t just go and disappear on us! And Kana-san also, what is the point if the person who goes out searching also becomes lost!”

“Kuh, so you’ve found me.....”

“You were *trying* to run away?!” While watching the beautiful lady being vexed, Sofie tilted her head.

“You... aren’t their mother... right?”

“Did you just look at my chest when making that guess?”

“N-Nonononono! Absolutely not.....” Sofie averted her eyes. In any case, an adult acquaintance had now shown up.

“In that case, then I’ll excuse myself. Kana-chan, Hina-chan, bye bye.”

“Sure, seeya~”

“Sorry for any inkonevience caused~”

After parting with Sofie, it was but a short while until they were reunited with their mother Silvia and Yuna.

As Hina spoke excitedly of the kind elf big sister, Silvia rubbed her daughter’s hair as if brushing it.

“You’ve had a very fortuitous meeting, then.”

Hina twisted around as if feeling ticklish, and answered energetically.

“I did. Sofie-onee-sama smelled like Otoo-sama~”

Abruptly, the air froze.

“D-D-D-Daddy’s, smell.....?”

“Yep! Very strong smell~!”

Silvia crumpled to the ground.

“Madam?!?!?!”

“Oh, I should have known. He’s such a wonderful person, after all. To have two or three lovers.....” While looking down at Silvia, who was lying on her side while covering her face with both hands and sobbing, Emalia found herself harboring doubts regarding this Grade 1 goddess’ sense of aesthetics.

That night, having to suffer through heavy pressure, even though he couldn’t remember what he did to deserve it, caused Shouzou’s nerves to be grinded away—

Chapter 9: Fighting for the Top

Shouzou was thinking about Marquis Goldas' third son, Jirahal, who had recently taken up the mantle of the guildmaster of Goldas Adventurer's Guild. As his investigation into this man progressed, he eventually arrived at a single conclusion.

(This man... is utterly unworthy of my time..... And I even had such high expectations when I first met him.)

For the past two years, Jirahal had been running a trading firm managed by Marquis Goldas' family. After he assumed the office, the performance of the company leaped up. This in itself should have merited quite a bit of acknowledgment, but the reactions of those around him were cold. He was short-tempered and violent. He often ran his mouth and said whatever came to mind. He also stubbornly refused to learn from his mistakes.

Shouzou recalled a certain man... and he was certain this man was responsible for Jirahal's great success.

That middle-aged man who had stuck with Jirahal the entire time. Belying his appearance as a man of the pen, this man clearly had the face and aura of a man of the sword.

His name was Kuntz. Born a commoner, he studied like crazy and became a government clerk. Then he was noticed and taken in by Marquis Goldas, who then assigned him to serve Jirahal. Surely Kuntz had performed exemplary support for Jirahal behind the scenes, helping to make his childish management work.

(However, I'm still missing a piece of the puzzle.) The methods employed by Jirahal to sabotage them so far were all so very childish.

Even though he had such a brilliant strategist beside him, why was that so? Shouzou couldn't answer that question.

(Is there something driving a wedge between them? If that's the case, then maybe it could be possible to get Kuntz-san to defect over to our side.)

Up till now, Kuntz's fangs and claws had remained sheathed.

But his ability was undoubtedly the real deal.

Unable to forget the taste from his recent string of success in headhunting personnel from other companies, Shouzou decided on Kuntz as his next target.

Toward that end, what he had to do was—

(Yep! Let's leave them be!)

It was probably only a matter of time until Jirahal slipped up big

and caused the relationship between the two of them to worsen even further. And so, Shouzou decided to simply watch on for a while longer—

While Shouzou was waiting leisurely, creepy laughter was reverberating within the office at Goldas Adventurer's Guild.

"Fuhahahaha! I've just thought of a brilliant idea!" Jirahal called Kuntz in, then explained his plan for how to pull one over on Elunheine this time.

"Listen carefully. You will go to the public office and look for the section chief of the Section of Quest Administration in their Control Division—"

Unlike before, Kuntz raised a question while receiving orders from Jirahal.

"Are you sure about looking only for the section chief?"

"Hah? That'll be more than enough. The thing about under the table dealings is that the less people who know about it, the better."

"So then, what should we offer as reward to those who cooperate?"

"Hah, what need is there for a reward? We're already giving so much money to those dogs in the public office. Make them realize that this is the perfect opportunity to repay us for all the favor we've shown them thus far."

"But then—"

"You are asking too many questions. If they push back, then just threaten them however much you deem appropriate. Do not do anything else uncalled for. All you need to do is loyally follow what I say, to the letter, without adding or subtracting steps as you please."

Kuntz replied, "As you command" expressionlessly, then headed off toward the public office with haste.

"Fufu, I can already see Eliza's cute face in a grimace."

Once again left alone in the office, Jirahal laughed loudly.

As the sound reached Kuntz, his mind whirled furiously in thought.

(To make the public office follow along without any rewards..... On top of that, our cooperators are too few in number. There is a limit to what I can do, but.....)

In order to win against Elunheine and that man named Onigawara, Kuntz kept weaving schemes inside his head with every scrap of time he had left—



"What's the matter?" Having been called to the office, Shouzou stood in front of Elizabeth, who was pouting at her desk. Adora was at her side.

Elizabeth slapped a stack of papers onto the tabletop.

“Quest posters from the government.”

“That looks like quite a lot. What is it that has happened?” asked Adora.

Aside from the ones that can be repeated, quests from the government were almost completely monopolized by Goldas. These quests that would come only once in a blue moon had suddenly waltzed in in such high quantity. This was something that under normal situations, they would have raised both hands and danced a jig for.

However, something had to be going on behind the scenes of this seemingly fortuitous turn of events.

Shouzou picked up one sheet and read through it.

“For a military campaign accompaniment quest, this reward is quite low, isn’t it. This is half the market price.”

“This one’s the same. What even is this? Nobody’s going to want to accept these quests.” Shouzou stroked his chin musingly.

“I see. So that’s what their aim is. In all likelihood, they are trying to lower our completion rate and use that to spread negative rumors about us.”

“That sounds exactly like something that idiot would do. I don’t even know whether to call this underhanded or childish.....”

“We haven’t processed any of these quests yet, right? Let’s just send all of them right back, then.” raged Adora, but things were not quite so simple.

“If Goldas is truly behind this, then the public office probably said something along the lines of ‘If you don’t take on these quests, then we won’t entrust you with any other ones in the future,’ right?”

“Spot on. In other words, they were insinuating that if we sent them back, they would interpret it the same as if we couldn’t complete the quests. That’s why we have no choice but to accept them. And we have no choice but to ask the adventurers capable of completing them to do it.”

“That’s going to be difficult. More like, it’ll be downright impossible. They’ve even gone to the trouble of making sure that all the quests they’ve sent us are Silver or above.”

The lower the class, the larger the pool of target adventurers.

Perhaps those who are in urgent need of money or those looking to rank up might take these on.

“President, that way of thinking is wrong.” Even though her opinion was denied, Elizabeth leaned forward eagerly, expectation emanating from her glowing eyes. Adora was also filled with excitement.

While blushing slightly, Shouzou continued speaking. “A guild

that compels its business partners—its adventurers—has no future. Those who take on quests begrudgingly might also not complete those quests. And above all, those adventurers would never accept quests from us again. The trust we have built up so far would be pulled to the ground. Surely this was also part of Jirahal's plan."

"Okay, so then?"

"So—"

"“Yes?”"

"Let's go talk with the public office directly."

"“.....”"

"We'll negotiate until we reach an agreement that both sides can accept."

The silence continued.

"“Hah~.....”" The two of them sighed deeply.

"In case you didn't get it, the public office is in cahoots with them, they're *working together* to do us in. What point is there in talking to them?" Elizabeth's shoulders drooped as she came to terms with the reality that even Shouzou's strategies could be wrong.

"Wait a minute, you're not planning on resolving this with brute strength, right?" Adora was also very skeptical.

"There is a chance at success. Naturally, in a peaceful way. However, I will not share the strategy with those who have such little faith."

Leaving behind a "Just wait for the good news," Shouzou quickly flew out of the office before the two could even call him back.



A grand and magnificent building that towered over a corner of the Central Plaza.

This was the public office that governed over all matters of this city.

"Um, are you sure that it's all right for me to come along?" While fixing her round glasses, Sofie voiced her question timidly.

"We haven't yet had the opportunity to do sales directly at the public office. It's a good opportunity. Learn everything you can from this."

"Y-Yes, sir!" Belying her energetic response, Sofie was filled with nothing but unease.

"Well then, let's go in. Section of Quest Administration of the Adventurer Control Division, right?" Shouzou strolled in through the door with confidence.

After he stated his desire to meet with the person in charge, the woman at reception curtly shot him down with "Unfortunately, he is not here at the moment."

“Then in that case, let me meet with someone who is *not* in charge.”

“I’m sorry?”

“It can’t be that every single person in that department is currently gone, right?”

“Eh, but if it’s not the person in charge, then they might not be able to help you.....”

“No worries, I understand. Or rather, it would suit my needs even better to talk to someone who doesn’t know what’s going on.”

“Ah, that’s.....” The lady looked slightly scared as she ducked inside to ask her superior for help. The aging man tilted his head, then called out to a male staff member who just happened to be walking by.

After being guided to a private room, Shouzou got his face-to-face meeting with that man. Shouzou promptly spread the quest posters out on the table and dove into the topic he wished to discuss. The staff member gazed at the posters, frowning in puzzlement.

“You are right, the reward amounts on these really are set too low.” But right after saying that, the man came to a start as if something had suddenly come to mind, then his face twisted into a grimace. It was exactly an “Oh shit, I got involved in something troublesome” kind of face.

Clearly he was aware of the circumstances to some degree, but this was not the time to pursue it. Shouzou bowed his head deeply.

“We are terribly sorry.” said Shouzou.

“Eh? I’m sorry, what.....”

“We accepted the posters without properly confirming the reward amounts. However, these are clearly mistaken. We were negligent in not carefully checking them when accepting these quest posters.” Shouzou kept his head down, but sharpened his senses to keep track of everything going on around him. The staff member seemed uneasy and completely at a loss for how to answer.

“Umm... then, we’ll, er, take these back to reconfirm them.”

Sofie’s face blossomed into a smile. Perhaps she thought that if the public office took these back, then they no longer had to accept these unreasonable quests anymore. However—

“Are you people from Elunheine?” The door was opened without even a knock. A middle-aged man came in. Judging by the staff’s murmur of “Section Chief,” this man was very likely the section chief of the Section of Quest Administration.

After the staff explained the situation with a face that looked half troubled and half relieved, “Elunheine-san, these are not mistaken.” So said the man with a forced smile, before even introducing himself.

“The quests issued by the rural public offices can be largely

classified as one of two kinds. You are aware of this, yes?”

“We are indeed. Ones issued by the rural public office by their own discretion, and ones issued by Central Public Office through a rural office. Is that correct?”

“Yes. In either case, it is up to the rural office to decide on the reward amount. Did you know this as well?”

“.....Yes I did.”

The section chief grinned. There was no mistaking it... this man was one of the conspirators. Shouzou knew without a doubt that this man was one of those cooperating with Jirahal.

“There’s just been a lot going on recently, and our budget is also limited, you see. If we don’t tighten our spending like this, then we can’t keep afloat.” Without waiting to see Shouzou’s reaction, the section chief doubled down.

“Elunheine-san has a very good reputation for finding the right adventurers to complete quests. We believe that you will find the right adventurers for these quests as well.” The smile on his face was pretty much just his mouth in a twist.

Shouzou returned a smile from the bottom of his heart, then leaned back into the sofa.

“That’s impossible.”

“Interesting. Are you saying that you are turning these down? If so, then hereafter we cannot entrust Elunheine-san with—”

“Now don’t get me wrong, I didn’t say that we are turning them down. But it’s just, this is going to be troubling, hm? For both of us?”

“Both of us.....?”

“I mean, isn’t it so? For us, yes it’s obvious, but your side also wants these quests completed, right? That’s why these quests exist in the first place. Especially military campaign accompaniment quests like this one. If no one fulfills it, it’s your personal reputation that is going to be negatively affected, isn’t it?” The look on the section chief’s face turned bitter.

However, it seemed like he was still not completely on the ropes.

Shouzou continued spinning his words while carefully observing the faces of the section chief and his subordinate.

“With your limited budget, I’m sure you must also be in a very tough position. Now, I have a suggestion here—” Shouzou smoothly leaned forward, lowering his voice.

“How about putting the local quests on hold first, so that you can prioritize the quests from Central and issue them with the appropriate reward amounts?” The section chief’s eyes widened.

However, that was not from surprise at the suggestion. Instead, a tinge of delight could be seen in the depths of his eyes. *(He predicted that I would make this suggestion..... No, he was forewarned of it, huh.)*

From this section chief's replies, Shouzou could feel a bit of the craftiness evocative of someone in a management position in a public office. However, this man himself seemed more like the kind of person who follows the instructions he was given to a T.

(So this must be something that was put into his head by someone. Was it Jirahal.....?) With how short-tempered and imprudent Jirahal was, he probably stopped at keeping the section chief in his pocket.

If that was the case, then Shouzou could break through by going directly above the section chief to someone not in the know.

Shouzou doubled down to confirm.

"If this is not something that you can confirm by yourself, how about bringing this to your superior, the division head of the Adventurer Control Division? If he is present currently, I'm sure this could be resolved much more smoothly if he comes down so we can discuss this face to face."

The section chief gave the suggestion consideration with arms crossed. However, the brief grin at the corner of his mouth did not escape Shouzou's eyes.

(So the division head is also involved... no, it's probably that this section chief is taking orders from the division head.) Shouzou was certain by this point that the person he was dealing with was not Jirahal, but Kuntz.

And at the same time, this was also the moment when Shouzou's original scheme fell through.

But in spite of that—

(How long has it been since I've had an opponent who's put up such a fight?) Shouzou's heart jumped with excitement at this showdown with Kuntz, the man who—though not present currently—very likely masterminded this plot.

The staff member who could not bear to just watch on anymore finally opened his mouth. It seemed that he actually did not fully understand what was going on, and thus honestly just wanted to help resolve the situation.

"We cannot make that call on our own, so we will discuss it with the division head first. Then we will contact you again at a later date....."

The section chief signaled him with his eyes. It was a gaze that ordered him to "not say anything unnecessary."

"No, no, we cannot waste everyone's time like that. Elunheine-san, please hold on a moment, we'll call the division head over at once." The section chief slowly got up.

Their acting was very well done, but it seemed like they wanted to talk Shouzou down as soon as possible.

Shouzou lowered his head with a "Yes please."

However, even if the division head showed up, the end result would stay the same. In that case, then there was no point in purposely calling him in.

“By the way—”

And thus, Shouzou decided to end this right then and there.

“Does the division head already know of this reward amount issue?”

The section chief’s face froze just the tiniest bit.

“I... wonder? Reward amounts are usually decided by our Section of Quest Administration, unless if the quest is a really big one. But he might have heard it mentioned in passing, maybe.....?”

“Hmm. If he did not already know, then he would be pressed to make a very difficult decision, wouldn’t he. But in that case, the longer he takes to make the decision, the harder and harder it will become to complete these quests. I mean, if the division head ends up affirming the original decision, then I’m afraid it would remain very difficult to complete these quests.....” Shouzou groaned, pretending to be deep in thought for a while.

Then he abruptly slapped his knee, and smiled.

“All right, how about I go directly to the Central Public Office and explain the situation to them and ask them to retract their quests? Then you can direct the freed up funds toward the local quests.”

“HAH?!” The Section Chief looked so astonished that his hips almost gave out, while the staff’s eyes also turned as wide as saucers.

“Oh, excuse me. I see that I’ve surprised the two of you with how lenient this measure is. I hear you loud and clear. As someone who also works in this city, I will make sure to give Central a good dressing down on your behalf as well, for swamping us with unreasonable requests without caring about the circumstances of rural public offices such as ours.”

“EHHHHH?!”

“Don’t worry, if Central only complains back at us, then I simply have to go even higher... Hey, how about I seek an audience with the king himself?” Shouzou laughed heartily as the two of them gazed at him with ashen faces.

This was especially so for the section chief, who was beside himself with fright. In the first place, he had gotten involved only because the division head had pushed Jirahal’s one-sided demand on to him. He was getting nothing out of this. It’s just that the division head had threatened to demote him with the marquises’ family’s power, so he was cooperating begrudgingly. It was the same for the division head.

However, things would be even worse if Central Public Office ever caught wind of this.

Although reward amounts are indeed up to the local office's discretion, reports of them setting inappropriate amounts would lead to no end of questioning. Such news could very well reach the ears of the king or nobles near him without Shouzou having to seek them out himself.

Once things escalate to that level, then Jirahal himself would be on very shaky ground.

Most likely... no, almost certainly, Marquis Goldas himself was not related to the incident this time.

(Come to think of it. Hasn't this just given me the just cause of "protecting" that idiot Jirahal?) Whether Shouzou meant what he said or not, it didn't matter at this point.

"Elunheine was going to go on a rampage, and I was trying to stop them" could make for a very legit excuse to give to Jirahal.

(Incidentally, for those curious, Shouzou actually did intend to go to the king in person, in the worst case scenario.)

(In the first place, setting up quests so that they don't get completed is wrong.....) Quests have meaning only when they are completed.

This was true both for adventurers and for quest givers.

The section chief actually had been considering limiting their dealings with Goldas, who had a very low completion rate. On the other hand, if they left things to Elunheine Adventurer's Guild, then their sales ability would definitely ensure that every quest would be completed.

If that happened, then there was no doubt that his own reputation would also rise.

(Oh come on, why am I even still hesitating. I'm sure even the division head will agree with me on this!) The section chief firmed his resolve.

"Very well, Elunheine-san." The look on his face was clear, and he looked like he had been freed from a great burden.

"By my authority, I will revert all of these quests' reward amounts to their appropriate amounts."

"Ohh! But then your budget....."

"Don't worry, we are used to lowering our heads to all the relevant departments. We'll rewrite all of the posters immediately, so please wait a short while."

The section chief and staff clutched the quest posters to their chests and flew out of the room—

On the way back from the public office.

"You've really pulled it off, Onigawara-san. We now have so many quests—with the appropriate reward amounts!—from the public office!" It was a crisis that threatened to undermine Elunheine Adventurer's Guild regardless of whether they accepted or declined.

But he managed to turn that around, and ended up with such a

large number of government quests that they normally got only once in a blue moon.

Sofie's excitement showed no signs of waning.

"It's not over yet though."

"Eh?"

"These are a lot of quests. Now we have to go around finding the right adventurers to complete each and every one of these."

"Oh, right. Yes, I'll do my very best!" The sight of the girl pumping herself up with motivation caused Shouzou's face to crumble into a smile.

On the other hand, he also recalled the figure of Kuntz inside his head.

(So it seems they haven't spread their influence all the way to Central. However, I mustn't let my guard down.) Shouzou pulled himself together once more.

However, unbeknownst to him at that time, that would end up as needless anxiety—



"Fuck, another failure!" After receiving the report from the public office, Jirahal pounded his desk again and again within his office at Goldas Adventurer's Guild. But that did nothing to quell his anger.

For the scheme that was supposed to bring down his enemy to instead contribute to their profits, of all things.

"I sincerely apologize for my insufficient ability." Kuntz apologized regretfully while standing in front of Jirahal.

"Insufficient... don't tell me, you did something unnecessary again?!"

"...Actually—" Kuntz honestly explained that he had also approached the division head, then once again apologized that he had still failed.

"You retard! This is all your fault, you're the one who messed up my plan!"

"....."

"Don't tell me that you're in cahoots with Elunheine? No, that must surely be it. How much did they pay you? Or was it women that they promised you?"

"No, they did no such—"

"Shut up! You incompetent fool. I begrudgingly allowed you to serve me just because my father said so, yet how can you have already forgotten this favor that I've shown you! That's it, you're fired. Leave my sight right this instant!"

Jirahal smashed his desk so hard that his hand became numb from the impact. He grimaced while nursing his hand.

“Shit, every single one of you, making a fool out of me. Now that things have come to this, I’ll directly make Eliza understand my power.”

Kuntz looked up at the ceiling. What Jirahal meant by that was kidnapping and physical torture.

Previously, just once, Jirahal had been on the very verge of committing a crime. He was stopped at the very last moment, but now there was no one who could stop him. Protests from someone that he had just fired would surely never reach his ears.

But even so, there was no way Kuntz could just stay silent and allow it. Elizabeth was the daughter of a noble family. One noble assaulting another noble could easily become an enormous scandal involving both families.

“Please do not mistake who your enemy is. Lady Elizabeth is indeed a formidable enemy, but it was the man named Onigawara who was behind Elunheine’s enormous progress. He is the one that you should be the most wary of.”

“What, you’re still here? What can a man who looks like even his head is filled with muscles do?”

“That is not so. Calling that man sharp and able would be an understatement. Lady Elizabeth’s guild was effectively swallowed up by the bottom feeder guild Elunheine—”

“All right, all right. In deference to your desperation at being abandoned by me, I’ll pay heed to your very last words of advice. But I won’t take back what I said; I want you to get the fuck out. You’re an eyesore.” Jirahal turned his back to Kuntz by spinning around in his rotating chair.

“Eliza, that idiot, don’t tell me she actually fell in love with that monster of a man for real? He is actually that capable a person? But wait, this reminds me that Elunheine—” Despite knowing that Jirahal, who had begun muttering to himself, was not looking, Kuntz still bowed his head deeply. Leaving behind a simple “I have been in your care,” he left Goldas Adventurer’s Guild—

Under the setting sun, Kuntz slowly plodded along the main avenue.

Just as Shouzou had deduced, it was indeed this man’s achievements that had been behind Jirahal’s great success in commerce.

It was Kuntz who had revised Jirahal’s haphazard schemes, taking direct command at the ground level. All this while taking the greatest pain to not let Jirahal catch on, so that he can continue thinking that it was all his own credit.

However, Marquis Goldas did catch wind of this eventually, and reprimanded Kuntz with “Stop spoiling my son!” That was why at

first, Kuntz had refrained from saying anything at all.

And the end result was that every single scheme that Jirahal attempted completely fell through.

Unable to overlook it any longer, this time he finally tried to make some alterations based on his own discretion, but only ended up angering his master and losing his job.

(It was about high time, I suppose. But this is troubling. Who is going to hire someone at my age who was fired from their previous position for having angered a noble?)

Kuntz plodded onward, until he found himself standing in front of a certain building.

He looked up, and saw the sign hanging there.

Elunheine Adventurer's Guild.



The right hand man of their business rival had come for a visit. That alone was enough to surprise Shouzou, but when he heard that the man had been fired by Jirahal, he was surprised a second time.

Rather than the reception room, Kuntz was beckoned to the office. Elizabeth scrutinized the two men from her seat.

“So then, Kuntz-san, what is your business in coming here?” From his position in the sofa across from Kuntz, Shouzou jump-started the conversation.

“I have come to apologize for two things, and to provide a warning.” Shouzou tilted his head at Kuntz's words.

“In regards to the numerous sabotage attempts committed against your guild, although I was in a position to stop Jirahal-sama, I did not do so. For having caused you so much trouble, I offer my deepest apologies.”

Kuntz bowed his head deeply.

When asked why he did not stop Jirahal, although initially hesitant, Kuntz eventually explained that it was the will of Jirahal's father, Marquis Goldas.

“Judging by what you've said, it sounds like you were merely caught in the crossfire of Marquis Goldas' attempt to discipline his son. Furthermore, everything ended up working to our benefit in the end. But honestly speaking, you had foreseen this outcome, had you not?”

“Actually, no. I thought it would be quite minor gains, if any. To see all our schemes turned around and taking advantage of so brilliantly, even I have no choice but to take my hat off to you.”

Shouzou replied, “Much obliged” and indicated thanks with his eyes, causing the room to be enveloped in a peaceful atmosphere.

However, then Kuntz tightened his expression, and changed his

tone of voice.

“And now, my other apology, and the warning. But before that, as context, please understand that Jirahal-sama is currently feeling much more cornered than anyone around him is thinking. So, then.....” Seemingly having trouble trying to say what he wanted, Kuntz shot a glance toward the desk. Perhaps feeling kind of bored, Elizabeth was fiddling with her golden hair with a finger while sipping from her cup of black tea.

“Jirahal-sama is currently planning to kidnap Elizabeth-sama to physically hurt her.” Elizabeth spat out her mouthful of tea in surprise.

“Knowing that my words could no longer reach him, and I know this sounds very self-serving, but I advised him that it was not Elizabeth-sama he was to be wary toward, but you, Onigawara-san. For what it’s worth, he did seem convinced.....”

“I see. So you are saying that the target has shifted from her to me?”

“I am deeply aware that what I have done has caused you and your family great trouble, Onigawara-san. However, I had no other recourse. Please accept my deepest apologies.” Kuntz lowered his head once again, so deeply that his forehead was grinding into the tabletop.

“I have two or three contacts. Until Jirahal-sama’s anger subsides, please hide there together with your family.”

“Hmm. So that was the warning, I assume.” Shouzou’s matter-of-fact reply was interrupted by Elizabeth.

“That’s not funny even as a joke. Causing Shouzou inconvenience just because of unjustified resentment, is there no limit to his unreasonableness? All right, I’ll ask my father to have a talk with Marquis Goldas.”

“However, that could possibly strain the relationship between the Marquis and the Count. As Jirahal-sama hasn’t actually done anything yet, there’s no telling whether Marquis Goldas would even be willing to listen..... He is a strict person, but when all’s said and done, he actually is quite soft on his children.....”

“We don’t have the time right now to deliberate this at such length!” Seeing Elizabeth indignation and Kuntz’s troubled look, Shouzou—

“Well, let’s just leave things be.”

“Hah?”

“Eh?”

“If the target is me, then there’s no problem. If he does anything, then I’ll pretend to be caught, then talk to him directly.”

Hearing Shouzou talk so matter-of-factly, Elizabeth shrugged her shoulders with “I guess you would do that, wouldn’t you?”

Acting like this conversation was done, Shouzou turned to ask Kuntz.

“By the way, Kuntz-san, what are your plans from here on?”

“...I still have a few connections from my previous workplace. I am hoping that one of them would be open to hiring me.”

“If it is all right with you, what do you think about working together with us?”

“I am very honored by the offer, but I did not come here with that intention. In the first place, we were business enemies mere hours ago. I don’t think I can accept.”

“The fact that you’re in the same industry only makes us see you as precious talent that we do not want to see falling into anyone else’s hands. It would be extremely reassuring for us if you would join us.”

Kuntz frowned while contemplating in silence.

He had already fulfilled his obligation toward Marquis Goldas for picking him up. He had no obligation toward Jirahal in the first place. He had already done his duty toward Elunheine.

At the moment, he was not beholden to anyone, yet the responsibility of providing for his wife and children weighed heavy on his shoulders.

“...Very well then. I will give everything I have, with the attitude of relearning everything from scratch.”

And this was how Shouzou ended up successfully obtaining immediately usable manpower that he hadn’t even wished for—

With that, Jirahal became truly isolated.

The danger of him resorting to tough measures still stood, but if Jirahal’s target was truly Shouzou, then the latter only saw it as an opportunity toward a timely resolution.

The claim that Shouzou had made at the start about making Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild the very top guild in the city seemed much closer now than it ever was.

(But the smoother things go, the more wary I must be. At the very least, I cannot cause my family any trouble or worry.) But that said, now that someone who knows the enemy so well has joined as an ally, Shouzou merely waited patiently, fully ready to handle whatever came his way.



Several days passed.

Having finished his work, Shouzou quietly closed his eyes at his seat. Sharpening his senses, he probed the outside of the building.

Recently, he had been constantly followed by someone, but the other side had yet to actually do anything.

He had considered catching his stalkers and questioning them, but

if they played innocent till the end, then he would have nothing on them. There was also the possibility that it was the other guild staff that they were after, so he remained wary.

“Onigawara-san, are you going home late today as well?” Sofie went over to his desk while pushing her round glasses back up.

“No, no, I was just about to head home.”

“Is that so. Th-That’s a coincidence. I was also... thinking of heading off.....” Sofie seemed nervous, shooting glances toward Shouzou repeatedly.

“It seems Adora and the others have already left. The roads at night are dangerous for a girl by herself. I’ll escort you home.”

“Th-Thank you!” Sofie’s eyes sparkled brightly, but then a voice cut in.

“Oh? Sofie, you’re going home now too? I’ll give you a ride in my carriage then. You live on the opposite direction from Shouzou, right?” Elizabeth’s carriage was escorted by guards. That should be safe enough. He himself was Jirahal’s target. And surely ruffians wouldn’t be able to do anything to the girls with all those guards around.

“That sounds like a good idea. Sofie, you go home with President then.” Shouzou stood up, picked up his attaché case, then walked off.

“Eliza-saaann.....”

“Eh, what? Why are you tearing up?” Sofie’s reproachful gaze left Elizabeth in flustered bewilderment.

While feeling behind his back this exchange between the two of them, Shouzou stepped outside—

After walking down the main avenue for a while.

(That’s quite a lot today.....) His stalkers had doubled from the usual two to four today.

Expecting them to take some action, Shouzou purposely went into an alleyway and proceeded deeper inside to where there were no more passersby.

However, no matter how long he waited, nobody assaulted him.

He was definitely being tailed, but his tails were merely maintaining a certain distance, and did not even circle around to cut him off.

He did not intend on wasting anymore time with them. But with that said, neither could he attack them preemptively.

Feeling quite vexed, Shouzou circled back to the main avenue.

As he was making his way toward the gate that led out of the city at a slightly hastened pace, a loud clattering noise closed in from behind.

It was the sound of a horse carriage charging at top speed.

Turning around, Shouzou found himself surprised by what he saw.

The carriage that was bearing down on him with incredible momentum was one that he recognized.

“Found you! Shouzou!” The person who leaned out from the window was none other than Elizabeth.

The box carriage came to an abrupt stop beside Shouzou.

“You were going above the speed limit.” Shouzou admonished Elizabeth with a serious face as she was leaping down.

“This is no time for that!” Elizabeth looked up with tears welling up from the corner of eyes filled with a mix of anger and fretfulness while spitting out shocking news.

—Sofie had been kidnapped! Even now, Sofie was staying in the same place as before, the office residential complex of the old Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild.

It was a tucked-away spot removed from the main avenue.

But the public order there was not so bad, and a carriage could pass through if driven very skillfully.

Elizabeth wanted to see Sofie off at the front door, but Sofie respectfully declined with “It’s just over there” and trotted off.

A vague apprehension kept Elizabeth standing still and watching Sofie’s back for a while.

It was just when she was about to get back onto her carriage that she heard the scream.

She immediately rushed over together with her guards, but there was only a weird smell in the air, with Sofie herself nowhere to be found. Moko immediately rushed out from the house too, but the smell messed with her nose and made it impossible for her to follow in pursuit.

It was clearly a premeditated crime. This was not an assault by a random ruffian who just happened to be around.

“In which case, the criminal is undoubtedly—” Shouzou flew sideways so fast as to leave behind an afterimage. He grabbed the two men peeking from the shadows of a building by their necks, and dragged them out.

“You two are Jirahal’s men, yes? Where was Sofie-san taken to?”

“We, we don’t know. We were only told to keep an eye on you—*gugah!*” He only tightened his hands a little bit, but one man had already fainted while spewing bubbles from his mouth, while the other groaned in agony with cold sweat spurting from every pore on his body.

“I-I don’t know where they took her. But I can give you the locations of our bases—” The man revealed the locations of several abandoned houses outside the city, as well as several stores with relation to Goldas.

Elizabeth breathed a sigh of relief.

“If Jirahal is the criminal, then Sofie will be safe for a while. That guy has a weird gentlemanly streak toward women. When all’s said and done, he’s actually kind of a klutz with women. It’ll be a pain, but let’s go through all their bases and eliminate them one by one.”

“.....President, I’ll leave it to you to do that together with your guards.”

“What are you going to do then?”

“I have someone in mind who has a knack for finding people. I’ll be working that angle.” Leaving those words behind, Shouzou dashed off fast enough to cut through wind.

He cleared the tall city walls with a leap. Onward to his house, the house where a certain goddess lived—

Upon arriving home, Shouzou found his whole family waiting to greet him at the door.

He briefly explained the situation, then asked Emalia to come with him, as she could supposedly use tracking magic.

“I’m afraid that’s not possible. My tracking magic can only be used on someone that I’ve met... hold on. Elf, glasses, going by the name of ‘Sofie’—”

“Sofie-onee-sama~!” Hina cried out energetically.

“Ahh! I remember now. But I only talked with her for a brief moment, so I’m not sure.....”

“Just knowing her general direction would be enough.” Due to the urgency of the situation, Shouzou did not give Emalia time to protest. He simply shouldered her like a sack of rice and dashed off again.

“I kind of feel like I’m being treated quite crudely!”

Emalia’s cry echoed into the moonlit night—

Watching the two of them disappear into the distance, Silvia cupped her cheek and murmured to herself.

“That’s a bit worrying.....” If possible, she would have liked to help out as well, but as she had never met Sofie.....

(Ah, but that reminds me, Hina’s met her before, hasn’t she?) Silvia stared long and hard at her own child.

“.....”

(Stare—)

“...Okaa-sama, what business do you have with Hina-sama~?”

“Hina-chan, how clearly do you remember Sofie-san’s face?”

“Hina-sama is not confident about how many eyelashes she has~”

“We don’t need that much detail.”

Silvia gave a magic lecture so simplified that even Hina would understand it. After that, a half-transparent window appeared in midair.

“Bring up the image of Sofie-san inside your mind.”

For some reason, Hina twitched her nose several times.

Then, on the map displayed in the window, a red dot appeared and began flashing.

“My, my, now this.....” The unexpectedness of the flashing dot’s behavior caused Silvia’s brows to scrunch up.

With this, she became quite convinced that Emalia’s tracking would not do the job.

“I need to tell Shouzou-san quickly, but.....” Even if she was to bring Hina along, she couldn’t leave Yuna and Kana by themselves.

“Mama, we’ll be fine.” So saying, Kana brought her fingers to her mouth and whistled.

From behind the house, they heard a flapping sound. Then a single young dragon landed close by.

It was the blue dragon that they had picked up from the nearby forest. Perhaps due to having been fed all the magic it wanted day in and day out, it had grown so large that its height upon standing up straight now exceeded even that of Shouzou.

“Oh that’s right, we have Puru-chan.” It was a *blue* dragon, thus the name “Puru.” The reason why the voiceless “P” was adopted instead of the voiced “B” was “because it’s cuter that way,” apparently. Because Puru was a girl.

“Wait a moment, Kana. We’re riding on Puru’s back? Even though there’s nowhere to hold on?” Yuna protested, her face turning pale.

“Puru’s scales are squishy and really easy to hold onto, don’t you know?”

“No no no no. That’s impossible for me. How fast do you think we’ll have to go to catch up with Dad? In the first place, you know I’m bad with heights!”

“What a high maintenance girl.....” Kana sighed, then grabbed Yuna while ignoring the “*K-Kyah?! Wait! Kana!*”

“Why a princess carry?!”

“Because I will be the one to protect Yuna-nee.”

“No more ikemen lines!”

In the end, Yuna stopped protesting (she zoned out from the fight), so Kana leaped onto Puru’s back with Yuna still in her arms.

“Everyone ready? Hina-chan, make sure to hug Mommy properly, all right?” Silvia floated up.

And so, Silvia and her daughters flew off into the night sky—

Having returned to Treia first, Shouzou sped here and there, before eventually taking up position on top of the clock tower that stood proudly in the middle of Central Plaza.

Emalia, who was still on his shoulder, was concentrating with her eyes squeezed shut.

“That way, I think. I’m sorry, the direction changed again.....” Along the way there, Emalia had corrected the direction toward Sofie

several times.

By now, it had been quite a while since Sofie had been kidnapped. Although the city was large, it was still more than enough time for her to have been locked up in a base somewhere.

But in spite of that, let alone Sofie's location, even the direction toward her location was still not yet settled.

"There are still a lot of people on the larger roads at this time, so the tracking magic is not very stable..... I'm sorry."

"....."

"But even so, this is strange, isn't it? Could it be that they are interfering with the use of some anti-magic spell?"

"....."

"But if that's the case, then the tracking magic shouldn't even activate in the first place..... In the end, it must be because I'm just not good enough. I'm sorry....."

"How troubling. It appears that we have been under a great misunderstanding." Shouzou scratched his head with his free hand.

"We had been thinking that Sofie-san has already been locked up somewhere, and so we need to find that place and storm it, but....."

Emalia peered into Shouzou's face, and found him looking off at a point in the distance with the face of the two wrathful Deva kings who stand guard in front of Buddhist temples.

"They are not holed up at a specific location. They have been on the move this whole time."



A carriage clattered on.

The small box carriage's curtains were drawn, such that there was no way to see outside. Instead of heading toward a destination, Sofie felt more like they were just aimlessly circling around inside the city.

Ever since she was kidnapped, the carriage had been running on and on, as if there were no destination in mind.

Back when she was seized, she had even been afraid for her life. Paralyzed with fear, all she could do was pray silently again and again for *that person* to come save her.

But that said, the other party seemed to have no intention of hurting her, and she had not even been tied up.

However, she was extremely exhausted, both mentally and physically.

"And so—you are still with me, yes?—in light of that, as for why I forcefully made you come along with me—" Sitting across from her, with legs crossed, was none other than Jirahal.

After being shoved into this carriage, the entire time she had been forced to participate in this unending conversation.

While lending an ear to what he was saying for the time being, Sofie tried to sort out the situation she was in.

Since she was not tied up with a rope, escape was possible. She might be weak, but even she had enough strength to unhinge the carriage door with a kick. However, although they were not going very fast, jumping out from a moving carriage was akin to committing suicide. So far, Jirahal had not displayed any intention of getting rough with her, so it probably would not be a good idea to provoke him unnecessarily.

What she should do at the moment was to buy time.

(*Onigawara-san is definitely coming to save me.*) Believe, and wait. She resolved inside her heart that this was her best option.

(*Still, stalling for time is easy to say, but.....*) Sofie looked straight forward wearily.

The man was still prattling on. What he was saying was completely incomprehensible.

Even if she was to go along with what he was saying to drag it out, she wasn't very confident that she could get onto his wavelength. The reason being that this man was under an enormous misunderstanding.

"Well then, in light of what I just said, now comes the main topic. Sofie, in your capacity as the person with the highest authority in Elunheine Adventurer's Guild, this is my proposition for you."

(*Why does he think that I have the most authority in Elunheine Adventurer's Guild.....*) Oblivious to Sofie's bewilderment, Jirahal continued on.

"Come under the umbrella of Goldas Adventurer's Guild. Naturally, I have zero intention of listening to any words of protest. All you are to do is to stay quiet and just sign here on this document." Jirahal proffered a piece of high quality paper.

A quick scan through revealed it to be a contract for handing over the guild's administrative rights. The guild's administrative rights lay with Elizabeth, as the guildmaster, and Adora, as the consultant, in a fifty-fifty split. Sofie herself was only the head of the sales department, so it would mean nothing even if she were to sign this.

However, what the man was claiming was that Sofie being the head of sales was a brilliant effort at subterfuge.

In order to break out of the status quo of the guild having fallen down to bottom feeder status, Sofie had supposedly cajoled Shouzou into joining. By skillfully utilizing him, who was as strong as an adventurer, she deployed numerous schemes that ultimately won over even Elizabeth. And ever since then, Sofie had been controlling the guild from the shadows, raising it to what it now was.

This was something made possible only by someone who inherited

the blood of the founder, Jirahal insisted with full confidence.

It hardly needed to be said, but all of the above was entirely Jirahal's delusion. It was Shouzou's achievements that had helped the guild to grow so much.

Despite feeling the urge to correct his misunderstanding, she also understood that it would not be a good idea to provoke him unnecessarily by refuting his theory.

(This is the perfect time to use what Onigawara-san has taught me.) Although she was indeed being coerced this very moment, she wasn't exactly left with no room whatsoever for negotiations.

In other words, the sales skills that she had learned from under Shouzou should be applicable.

But, even so.

This was a discussion about a large scale merger. Sofie tried suggesting that they gather the top brass of both guilds at a proper venue on a later date to discuss this proposal at length.

"This is just something for the heads of the organizations to decide, isn't it? Everyone else can just be informed after the fact."

Sofie tried explaining that doing so would only cause unnecessary confusion, which would negatively affect the business of their guilds.

"Organizations move based on orders from on top. If I give the order, then there's no way that any problems will arise."

Finally giving up, Sofie confessed to being merely the head of the sales department, and admitted to not having any administration rights in the guild.

"Ha ha ha, don't think you can deceive me."

(This person is beyond saving..... He must surely be one of those people who "cannot be reached with words" that Onigawara-san told me about.....) This was among the many things that Shouzou had taught her.

When it comes to someone who can't understand what you're saying, change up the way you talk. When it comes to someone who cannot be reached with words, do not engage them in the first place.

If they don't understand what you're saying, that means there is a mismatch in the two parties' perception or in their understanding of the circumstances of the situation in question. In other words, there is a gap that needs to be bridged.

On the other hand, someone who cannot be reached with words is, in other words, an incredibly egotistical person. Their unshakeable belief in their own correctness is what makes them "unreachable."

And thus, it doesn't matter what you say, it would be of no use.

Therefore, the best thing to do is to not engage such people in the first place. However, inside this carriage, where no venue of escape was available, choosing to not engage was impossible.

What to do in such a case? Among the many methods that she had learned from Shouzou, the one that Sofie chose was—

“Speaking of which, Jirahal-san, your previous job was related to international trade, wasn’t it? Does that mean you’ve been to other countries many times? Do you have any interesting stories from those trips?”

To change the topic.

Time was a limited resource. Waiting for the time to run out in this way was also a viable hand to play. Because her very top priority at the moment was to stall for time until help came for her.

Jirahal’s eyes sparkled.

“You want to hear? Then I shall tell you. Now, this was something that happened back on my very first voyage—” Leaning forward eagerly, Jirahal began to chatter on loquaciously.

Speaking honestly, she really did not want to, but Sofie resolved herself to bear with this torment. She told herself that she had only to endure it until Shouzou came to save her.

But unfortunately, Jirahal was not so easy a man.

“—And that was when I said it to him straight. ‘Come the day after!’ was exactly what I said.” Jirahal looked very smug.

“I... I see..... that... was very amazing.....” Sofie was beginning to get very fed up with Jirahal. As someone in sales, Sofie was no stranger to having to listen to business partners brag about their past exploits. That was why she thought she would be able to handle this hands down. But the problem was, it turned out that his bragging was so absolutely boring that she felt her soul being worn away.

Unable to bear it any longer, Sofie hung her head. That became the signal.

“Well then, I still have so much more to tell, but we will have plenty of time for the rest starting tomorrow onward. Come, sign this contract.” Jirahal held out the contract.

As someone who had no administrative rights, her signature on the contract would not be worth anything at all. However, with respect to her identity as the daughter of the founder, doing so might give Jirahal a foot in the door for something else down the line. And at that time, even if she claimed that she signed under duress, there is no guarantee that that would be effective defense.

Shouzou’s face flashed through her mind.

She shook her head to chase away her wish for him to come soon.

(That’s no good. I can’t just be relying on him all the time.) Sofie pulled her wearied heart together, resolving to give him a resolute refusal.

But, the exact moment that she decided that.....

The contract before her eyes was split cleanly in two.

Cold air caused her body to shiver. If she understood correctly what had just happened, a cold blade had just cleaved through not only the contract, but—

“Wh-Wh-Wh-What is happeni—?!”

The entire box carriage had been split in two along the coronal plane.

The front part continued being pulled by the horses, and thus was dragged off into the distance. Sofie, who was sitting in the back part, desperately tried to cling onto her seat, but her efforts were not enough to resist the power of momentum, and so she was thrown out forward.

The stone pavement rushing toward her face caused a spike of terror to course through her.

However, the next instant, her body came to a gentle stop in midair.

“Oh honey, I’m sorry for scaring you. Puru-chan’s ice blade turned out to be much stronger than we had expected.” When her feet finally touched ground, the floating feeling disappeared.

Before her eyes stood a woman.

She was a stunning beauty with long silver hair. Sofie immediately forgot her fear, instead sighing in marvel as if she was beholding a real goddess.

Then a small face peeked out from behind the woman, and jumped toward Sofie.

“Sofie-onee-sama, are you hurt?!”

“Gueh, H-Hina-chan?! Eh, why is.....?” Withstanding the impact to her abdomen, Sofie sees a cute face looking up at her.

“Our family came to save you~!”

“Your... family.....?” Lifting her gaze, her eyes met with those of a young girl riding on top of a blue dragon the size of a horse. It was Kana, who Sofie had met along with Hina in town previously. Within the arms of the mischievously smiling girl was another girl with spinning eyes who looked slightly older than Kana.

Sofie even recognized the blue dragon.

It had grown a lot bigger, but there was no doubt in her mind that this was the whelp that had lost its parent when she saw it last.

When Sofie turned back toward the silver-haired woman, the woman smiled warmly before opening her mouth.

“So you are Sofie-san. Nice to meet you. I am Silvia Onigawara.”

“Oni... gawara.....?”

“That’s me. It seems my husband has been greatly in your care.” Even though her smile was filled with kindness, Sofie found herself overawed by an indescribable sense of pressure.

(Eh, no way..... Onigawara-san... is married.....? Moreover, he even

has this many children.....) As her mind struggled to process this shocking discovery, the sound of Jirahal's voice reached her ears.

"What is the meaning of this! Do you think you can get away with this?! Don't you know who I am? I am Jirahal Goldas!" His half of the carriage finally having come to a stop, Jirahal half-rolled and half-stumbled out.

Blind with rage, he made to step forward, but immediately found himself blocked by—

"Oh, we know full well." None other than the very person that Sofie had been waiting eagerly for, Shouzou himself—

Upon figuring out that Sofie was being held inside a moving carriage, Shouzou had then identified a suspicious-looking carriage thanks to Emalia's tracking magic.

It just so happened that Silvia and the girls also appeared to be heading toward it, so it became all but confirmed that that was the carriage that Sofie was on.

Puru-chan had bisected the carriage before Shouzou could assault it, but their aim was fulfilled, so all's well that ends well.

"I was mistaken, Jirahal." Shouzou looked down with rage in his gaze, which caused Jirahal's hips to give out as he squeaked with alarm.

"I should never have left you alone so long, not after all the underhanded methods that you had stained your hands with."

"Y-You can't do anything to me, I'm—my father is Marquis Goldas!" Shouzou merely took one step forward wordlessly. It was enough to prompt Jirahal to begin crawling backward, his butt dragging on the ground.

"Onigawara-san, please don't be violent with him. He didn't hurt me." He turned around at Sofie's voice.

Her clothes and hair were indeed unruffled. As she said, it was clear that she really had not been harmed.

But the smile on her face was also clearly a forced one.

It felt so fake that it almost seemed like she had received some incredible mental shock.

That was why Shouzou's anger did not dissipate.

"I-If you lay hands on me, my father will not keep quiet about it! He will squish your measly guild in no time at all!" It seemed like Jirahal still could not put strength into his lower body, and his face was twitching furiously.

"Don't worry, I'm not thinking of doing anything to you." The color in Jirahal's face got better for only a split second.

Shouzou grabbed him by his neck. "Conversation does not work with you. And thus, there's no point talking to you. Therefore—"

"Eeep!" Then Shouzou easily lifted him up with one hand. "You

might be already of age, but responsibility for a child's faults lies with the parents." Brooking no protest, Shouzou threw Jirahal onto his shoulder, then left the place at his full speed—



Marquis Goldas was the feudal lord who governed over the immediate area around the fortress city of Treia.

However, his high office within the military required him to stay in the royal capital.

Treia was not that far away from the capital.

Shouzou dashed at top speed and leaped over the city walls, arriving at the quiet residential neighborhood overlooked by the royal palace.

The front gate of the large mansion went down with a single unhesitant kick.

Guards rushed over en masse, but Shouzou did not move even an eyebrow, merely proceeding forward with Jirahal in tow.

Due to Jirahal, who was currently completely limp from exhaustion, the guards could not do anything. As they formed a circle and watched on from a distance away, Shouzou confidently strode through the grounds without sparing a side glance.

Eventually, the guards in his way stepped aside.

From the path that opened up, a giant of a man in the prime of his life appeared with composure.

He had a fearsome face fully decked out with a fearsome beard. His eyes were sharper than those of a hellhound's, and his gaze was so powerful as to be capable of driving back magic beasts.

With a gigantic spear in hand, his rough voice echoed out.

"Speak. Why have you barged onto my property, by yourself, with my son as hostage?"

"Mm. So you are Marquis Goldas." The man nodded imperceptibly.

This man was Jilk Goldas himself.

This man, who had emerged victorious from over a hundred battles and had enough ability to stand proudly beside Platinum class adventurers, was revered as the strongest warrior in the entire country.

"Judging by your appearance, you must be a staff member from that adventurer's guild that I have heard rumors of. Onigawara, was it? You have kidnapped my son, and trespassed onto the property of a noble without prior consent. Don't think that you can get off without repercussions." Goldas brandished his spear once.

The wind roared, and the guards staggered.

In addition to his skill with a weapon, the sense of intimidation

that Shouzou felt from him seemed akin to a blizzard in the middle of a severe winter. It was indeed on par with what he had felt from that Dragonslayer kid that he had met before.

“But that said, depending on how you plead, I might overlook this. Speak. What business do you have with me?”

“Plead?” Shouzou took Marquis Goldas’ intimidation as a passing spring wind. “I have come to speak about education.” As he spoke, he unceremoniously dumped Jirahal to the ground.

“Education, you say?”

“Are you aware of what this young man has done up till now?”

The marquis shot Jirahal a quick look, then smiled thinly.

“In a general sense, yes. Ahh, I see. You couldn’t stand him getting in the way of your business any longer, so you tied him up and came to complain to me as his parent.”

Shouzou could not reply.

“Now I am just disappointed. His foul play rubbed you the wrong way, so you resorted to violence? Guess you really are as much of a brute as you look. Business is fought with brains. It is a battlefield where you employ all your wits and wiles to subdue your enemy. To —”

“Silence.” Shouzou cut him off with a single quiet, yet heavy, word. “I disagree with a few things that you just said, but that’s neither here nor there. You have to understand, I did not come here to speak business. I said it just now. I have come to speak about education.” He sucked in deeply, opened his eyes wide, then—



“You GREAT FOOL!!” His thunderous roar caused a shockwave that sent the surrounding guards flying.

Jirahal foamed at the mouth from his position on the ground.

Marquis Goldas clenched his abdomen and withstood the impact. As expected of the man with an uncountable number of battles under his belt.

“Your child has gone astray. Yet you merely label it as ‘wits and wiles’ while indifferently looking on?!”

“Guh.....”

“You were right about one thing. In business, there are times when even improper methods have their place. However, the only people who can use improper methods correctly are those well familiar with the proper methods. As a parent, it is your duty to show your children what is right. If his understanding of the right path is insufficient, then it is your place to teach him what he needs to know. Am I wrong?”

“You... are you lecturing me? Me, a marquis.....?!” The marquis glared at Shouzou fixedly.

However, then his brows bunched up in a scowl, and he sighed heavily.

“No, let’s put that aside for now. As a father, I will resign myself to it.” The marquis began talking.

“As soon as this one was born, my wife passed away. It just so happened to also be the time when the family headship passed to me. I admit that I was not able to find much time to spend with my children.” The marquis continued with slumped shoulders, confessing to having spoiled especially Jirahal, as he was the only one among the children who did not get to know his mother.

“But those are mere excuses. Ultimately, I had indeed shirked my responsibilities as a parent. I made sure they had a job, assigned talented people to work under them, and then became complacent with that. No, I suppose it would be more exact to say that I had tried to put them out of my sight, even.....”

“You were afraid?”

“Afraid? Hah..... perhaps you are right. I thought I had conquered fear from all the battlefields that I had stood on, but it seems that I had run away from raising my own children.”

“I fully understand how you feel. The very first time I held my own child in my arms, I was filled with nothing but worry. I self-importantly said I came to ‘speak of education,’ but even I myself don’t know whether I am truly fulfilling my own duties as a father. However, even so, there is a solution.”

“Interesting. You have a suggestion?”

“I do indeed. Thinking about it, your failure could be chalked up to a single point. Namely, that you did not rely on anyone else. There is a difference between entrusting it to someone else and wholesale delegation. The point is to ask for advice from someone else with a hundred battles under their belt. In other words—”

“In other words?” Marquis Goldas leaned forward.

Shouzou pronounced judgment with solemnity.

“You need to make dad friends.”

“Dad friends.”

“Indeed. Find and deepen your relationship with other fathers similarly puzzling over child rearing. Share your worries, brainstorm solutions together, learn from case studies together. Furthermore—” Shouzou grew increasingly passionate while talking.

“Back where I used to live, there were even champions called ‘ikumen.’ I had been messaging—something like correspondence by letter—with them, and learning things about both child rearing and how to support my wife.”

“Ikumen..... to think that there were such men out there.” Marquis Goldas gulped audibly. His gaze toward Shouzou was filled with envy.

“Are you also one of those ikumen?”

“I am still far away from that status. However, I have already learned much from them.”

“Hmm..... But still, to learn about child rearing after all this time.....”

“A father is a father for life. Don’t let the sooner or later bother you. The moment you come to that realization is the moment you begin.”

“You speak truly,” said the marquis with the look of someone who had been freed from a heavy weight. He threw his giant spear to the side with a clang. Slowly, he walked toward Shouzou.

“Would you be my very first dad friend?” The hand that he proffered was accepted by Shouzou’s firm grip.

“If you would have me.” A pitter-patter of applause could be heard from the guards that had been watching on this entire time with slack jaws. All of them looked thoroughly confused as to how these events had ended up developing into the two of them shaking hands.

“Incidentally, Onigawara.” Marquis Goldas’ face was the very definition of serious as he still had Shouzou’s hand in his grasp.

“During the time when I will be re-educating Jirahal, my guild will be without a guildmaster. It would take far too much time to search for someone to fill the position. So what do you think about it? Do you think I can leave it to you?”

Toward that proposal, Shouzou’s answer was—



“Seriously, don’t you think it such a waste of an opportunity?”

During the brief respite of tea time. The guildmaster, Elizabeth, could not help but murmur this again.

The topic of conversation was on how Goldas Adventurer’s Guild had welcomed a new guildmaster, who had helped to breath life back into it. In the end, Shouzou did not accept Marquis Goldas’ offer. Not only that—

Adora wiggled her heavy body while chiming in. “Was there really a need to return Kuntz to them?”

Shouzou had even proposed returning Kuntz—the man who used to be Jirahal’s right hand man—to the Goldas side. At the time, Kuntz had already officially become employed at Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild, so the cover story was that he had gotten headhunted back by Goldas Adventurer’s Guild. His skill was a sight to see, and he was gradually helping Goldas Adventurer’s Guild get back to its feet after all the troubles it’d been through.

Shouzou replied nonchalantly.

“Come now, wouldn’t things get boring without a rival? Kuntz-san is very capable, and Goldas Adventurer’s Guild is currently still ahead of us in both scale and backing.” Then Shouzou continued while smiling carefreely like a child. “But that’s also what makes them worth beating.” Just as he said, the morale of the staff at Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild continued to rise—

—When the winds of summer blew through the city in visit.

Shouzou was sharing a drink at Marquis Jilk Goldas’ estate.

On top of the table between them lay a spread out map. With the kingdom located in the center, it also showed several of the neighboring countries. Right above the kingdom, two cups clinked together in toast.

“Finally, you’ve surpassed me.” Marquis Goldas emptied his cup in one swig.

“It was all thanks to Raulo Adventurer’s Guild submissively allowing us to absorb them whole. That was the deciding factor.” Shouzou imitated Jilk in emptying his cup.

His goal had finally been achieved.

He had successfully pushed Elunheine Adventurer’s Guild up to become the biggest in the city.

They poured for each other, then clinked their cups again.

“So, what’s next?”

“What, indeed.” Shouzou had already decided on his next goal, but he saw no need to reveal his hand right now.

Jilk nailed Shouzou with a sharp gaze.

“Shouzou, do you have any intention of serving our king?”

“The king.....? That’s quite an abrupt thing to bring up.”

“You are a man for whom it would be a waste to be buried in obscurity. What do you think about serving our country from a spot right beside our king, from where you will be absolutely free to exert your full ability?” Jilk leaned forward eagerly, but Shouzou merely returned his gaze and shook his head.

“I take pride in the work I do now. I have no intention of quitting.”

“Hah, I knew you would say that.” Jilk readily backed down. From then on, he never brought the topic up again.

After Shouzou went home, Jilk poured another drink for himself. Staring into the swirling liquid, he murmured softly to the empty sofa, “Shouzou, no matter how much you resist, you will eventually come to our side, to the stage of national politics.” That was not his wish, but a prediction that he was sure of.

“The magic beast known as “circumstance” will not let you go.” Emptying his glass in one gulp, with a *bam!*, Jilk put his glass onto the table. Right onto a certain country across the ocean, as if to crush it with force—

Omake Short Stories

On a certain morning, Elizabeth was sitting in her chair in the office, with her face showing a forced smile.

There was an entire mountain of paperwork stacked densely in front of her face.

She had to get through all of it within the day, and there was even more on the way.

Currently, they were right in the middle of their talks with Raulo Adventurer's Guild. Quests were also flooding into their guild, which meant more work for her than ever before.

This amount of work was something that she would have never even dreamed of a short while ago, back when her guild was still Shining Eagle Adventurer's Guild.

Managing a guild was her father's idea of social studies. The more she did it, the more fun she found it, the more she felt meaning in continuing it, and she even started feeling attachment to it. She felt keenly the heaviness of responsibility, but that also became her source of pride.

Now that they had merged with Elunheine, everything had gotten much larger in scale.

However, in the moments when she relaxed during their busy times, she came to realize an empty hole had formed inside her heart.

Feeling irritated at not understanding what the feeling was, she turned her vexation toward the paperwork.

"How's progress?" The person who appeared after a knock was Shouzou. He was holding even more paperwork in his arms.

"Come now, why the long face? I'm sure our highly capable president can take care of this amount of paperwork in no time."

"I'm not going to be sweet talked by you, all right? I mean, I'm still going to do them though. But admin work really isn't my thing. Making a ruckus together with everyone else on the ground floor is way more fun."

"Ah yes, you're the type of manager who inspires and riles up everyone else from the front lines."

"What does that mean? Is that a compliment?"

"Of course it is. I'll think about your request. In the meantime... how about I go find Adora and bring her over? She's probably just hanging around somewhere doing nothing."

With a “Thanks, that’ll be a great help,” Elizabeth slapped her own cheeks and put on a grin.

“What was that?”

“This isn’t a face that a president should show the staff, right? I only felt a little bit dispirited, so let my guard down a little. But from now on, I’m going into President Mode.”

“I see. As expected of our guildmaster.” Despite feeling newfound admiration for her, Shouzou could not help but to leave a word of advice while placing the paperwork in his hand onto her desk.

“However, there are people that you *can* let down your guard to. Me and Adora, for example. Listening to the staff’s complaints and encouraging and praising them may also be a part of your job, but make sure to vent all the things you bottle up, just like you did now.” Shouzou placed his large hand softly on her head.

“Feel free to dump all of your complaints on me and Adora.” He rubbed her blond hair tenderly, as if she were another of his children.

“D-Don’t treat me like a child.”

“I have no intention of doing so.”

“In the first place, I’m already pretty vocal to everybody regarding my complaints.”

“What you do with the staff, that’s what’s called ‘galvanizing.’ Others might call it ‘pep talks.’ At the very least, I myself have never seen you truly sharing your dissatisfaction with the staff.” Shouzou continued rubbing her head regardless, prompting Elizabeth to raise her hand toward her head as if to put up a resistance. However, that hand froze in midair from the next words he said.

“You are doing a wonderful job.” She got praised.

It was different from the words of praise, both sincere and mere flattery, she had been showered with due to being born as a noble, and from taking up the position of guildmaster.

This was warm, like a father’s words of appreciation and acknowledgment toward his daughter.

“Mm? Your face is red. You also feel a bit feverish, have you fallen under the weath—”

“Sh-Sh-Sh-Sh-Shut up! Enough! I want to focus on my work!” Raising her voice clamorously, Elizabeth chased Shouzou out of her room.

“Goodness..... What was that, seriously.....” For a while, Elizabeth pressed down on the place where Shouzou had been patting her, and basked in the afterglow.

The hole in her heart seemed to have been filled before she knew it—



After stepping out from the office, Shouzou descended to the first floor. He walked into the main lobby area.

The time of the day when the reception lobby is the most busy is right after opening hours. Then there is also early afternoon, which is when new quests get posted up, and around dusk, which is when adventurers come back to collect their rewards.

Right now just happened to be just after the morning rush, so the reception lobby was quite peaceful.

The staff were taking turns manning the reception counters and consultation booths and going on break.

Among them all, Shouzou found Lalaine curled up at her desk. The girl of the Naga race was quietly muttering to herself, such that no one could bring themselves to initiate conversation with her.

“Lalaine-san, how about going on break soon?”

His attempt at talking to her caused her to start and mumble, “R-Right now th-there’s.....”

Apparently, she was so shy that if there was anyone else taking a break, she couldn’t go alone to join in.

Moko came over in a run. The beastkin girl’s ears and tail were twitching busily.

“Have *you* taken a rest?”

“Nya? I rested tons!” She looked astonished. Feeling something slightly amiss with her answer, Shouzou noticed Lalaine shaking her head vigorously. It appeared that Moko had yet to take a break today.

“You understand that resting is also part of your job, right?”

“As I said, I’ve already rested tons!” Moko did not look like she was lying. And it was equally unlikely for Lalaine to have misunderstood.

Seeking to get to the bottom of this, Shouzou brought the two of them away for a talk.

The three of them headed toward the break room behind the staff area of the first floor.

The staff member who was resting there just happened to be leaving the room, leaving Shouzou to prepare tea for the two girls. Just when he was making cups of black tea with an unpracticed hand.....

“Oni-occhan, are you thinking of doing something ecchi to us?” Lalaine gave a huge start. Her tail stood up straight and the tip froze altogether.

“Adora said it before. She said, ‘When a man brings a girl to an empty place, his aim is to do ecchi things, so be careful.’”

“.....Hmm. That sounds like advice that Adora would give. And to a third party, the situation right now could perhaps be construed as such. I shall be more careful going forward.” But then he made sure to

deny the question vehemently.

“I can’t seem to let this go. Moko-san, allow me to ask you again. Have you taken a break?”

“I have~” Moko’s instant reply prompted Lalaine to shake her head again, and begin murmuring.

“Moko... didn’t take... break..... Not only today, but every day.....”

“Every day?” Shouzou directed his eyes toward Moko.

“I took so many breaks before, so I don’t take them anymore,” said Moko matter-of-factly.

The reason why the two accounts contradicted each other then became clear with the next question.

“Moko-san, when did you take your last break?”

“Before Oni-occhan came to us at Elunheine. Back then, I always had nothing to do, so that was pretty much taking a break all day every day, right? Nowadays I’m super busy, but it’s also super fun~ So it’d be such a waste to go on breaks!”

There are people whose work is their hobby. Shouzou himself was also one such person.

However, it is especially when you enjoy doing something that you lose your head in it, not realizing your own tiredness and the strain you are putting on your body.

However, while looking at her carefree smile, Shouzou understood that it would be meaningless to verbally explain the meaning of resting or the importance of refreshing oneself.

If that’s so—

“Moko-san, can I task you with finding time several times a day to talk with Lalaine-san?”

“Nn? Why?”

“What with all the new staff that we’ve hired, her shyness must be making her feel overwhelmed. That’s why I want you, who has already earned her trust, to help ease her nervousness.” Lalaine nodded so furiously she seemed like a head banger in a rock band during a live show.

“Leave it to me~” Moko pounded her chest.

“All right, take a breather or two, then get back to work. Feel free to take it easy till then.” Shouzou refilled their cups, made Moko sit next to Lalaine, then rubbed her fluffy head.

“I’ll be leaving Lalaine-san in your care then.” With that, Shouzou left the break room—

Sitting in a row, the two of them sipped at their tea. The two of them were enveloped in an atmosphere that made it hard to initiate conversation.

This was what Moko was thinking.

(*So it was Lalaine who was on Occhan's mind.....*) She is someone who makes other people want to protect her, and she's really pretty, and she is so knowledgeable about quests and adventurers, and the two of them talk together a lot, so perhaps it's only natural. But on the flip side, Moko found herself feeling slightly envious.

In contrast, this was what Lalaine was thinking.

(*He rubbed... her head... and also worried... about her well-being.....*) Although she thought it only natural for him to be worried about the energetic and busily working Moko, somehow Lalaine found herself feeling slightly jealous.

Both of them shot a glance toward the other, and their eyes met.

"Ehehe....."

"Fu, fufu....."

In the end, that was it, and a conversation did not blossom between them—



After noon had come and went, the adventurers in the lobby grew sparse.

As the staff split into two shifts for lunch, half of the reception counters were left unattended.

Shouzou reached out to the bento filled with his wife's love, just about to take a slightly belated lunch.

"I-I'm back~....." Sofie returned from her rounds, looking noticeably dispirited. Upon sitting down at her seat, immediately she planted her face onto her table. Shouzou could not help but to call out to her.

"Sofie-san, have you had your lunch yet?"

"Eh? Oh, is it already lunchtime....." The face that Sofie lifted up had "no appetite" clearly written across it.

"I was also just about to start eating. Would you like to join me?"

"Eh..... Y-Yes sir! Please allow me to join you!" While seeing her being all flustered from the corner of his eye, Shouzou returned his bento to his attaché suitcase and stood up.

Sofie always ate her lunch outside. She also frequently ordered takeout and ate it inside the guild, but sitting down at an eatery outside would probably be better for having a conversation. Even though he was bringing in outside food, if he ordered a drink, then the place probably wouldn't mind.

With Sofie in tow, Shouzou made his way toward her favorite place.

They eventually stepped into a cozy tavern located one street away from the main avenue. In the evenings, this place was frequently filled with Iron and Copper-ranked adventurers, and even for this time

of the day, they composed the majority of the customer base.

Sofie ordered a stew filled with vegetables, with bread as a side.

While waiting for the food, Shouzou dived right in.

"It seems that today's customer was quite the tough nut to crack, hm?"

"...Yes. It was a caravan that visits this city often, but—"

Treia's prosperity was due to the adventurer industry. So caravans would come visit, either going to large shops that they partner with, or going to guilds directly in order to post their quests.

In most cases, these are quests that can be fulfilled within the few weeks that they are in town, so that they can bring the materials back to their base town and sell them there for a profit. Then there's also a smattering of bodyguarding quests to accompany their travels.

This time, it seems that Sofie had gone straight to a caravan that they had no prior contact with, without an appointment. However, her expression was enough to deduce that it had ended in failure.

"What I should have done was just give my greetings today and make a promise to come again another day....." Sofie shrunk in on herself.

Shouzou asked her a few questions. Based on her answer, it became evident to him that the reason behind her failure was—

"It sounds like the person you were talking to was someone who 'cannot be reached with words.'"

"Um no, he replied to me in the same language I used. Did my account of the meeting make it sound like he couldn't understand me?" When Sofie paid her visit, the caravan's person in charge happened to be not there. But the person that she ended up making her sales pitch to was someone who kept replying to her about things completely unrelated to what she was saying.

"I meant that in a metaphorical way. Even when using the same language, there are times when conversation fails between two people. If it is a simple matter of your meaning not getting across, then it is possible to reconfirm each other's understanding and thus bridge the gap. However, against someone who cannot be reached with words, whatever you do would still end in failure." Thinking this the right opportunity, Shouzou explained all this to her as such.

The food finally arrived, but Sofie was mulling over what Shouzou had just said so deeply that she had to be reminded to eat.

"What should I do then, when I happen to bump into someone like that?"

"Don't engage them. That's the best way."

"But this time, I couldn't really do that....."

Not only this time, but isn't that quite impossible to insist on? Sofie thought doubtfully.

But Shouzou replied nonchalantly.

“That’s not quite true.” But before explaining why... Shouzou offered several countermeasures for when it really cannot be avoided.

Sofie listened intently to every word he said, all while waiting impatiently for his explanation.

“—and well, that’s about it. With that in mind, now I’ll tell you what you should be doing.” Sofie leaned forward in eagerness.

“You should have broken up the conversation quickly, and made an appointment to speak with the person in charge directly at a later date.” Although seeing the logic in that, Sofie was thinking that sometimes trying to break up a conversation was much easier said than done.

“What’s important is not that part, it’s the second part. Even if the conversation ends up being dragged out for a while, as long as you manage to set up the appointment with the person in charge for next time, then your goal will have been accomplished.” It did not even have to be with the person who cannot be reached with words. On the way out, you could even just grab anyone else to set up the appointment for you also, concluded Shouzou.

Sofie sighed heavily all while feeling deeply impressed.

Her respect for Shouzou rose again, while at the same time—

“I... really still have such a long way to go.....” She felt ashamed that she had become conceited over finally being of some use.

Her lowered head suddenly felt Shouzou’s large hand on top.

“Don’t let it get you down. You are steadily growing every day. And today you just learned something new again.” Shouzou’s way of rubbing her head was both slightly ticklish and also very comforting.

Her late father, Elunheine, had also frequently rubbed her head in the same way.

“Well then, the afternoon’s going to get busy. Make sure to eat up and refill your energy.”

“Yes, sir! I’ll try the caravan one more time!”

Shouzou’s smile and encouraging “That’s the spirit!” seemed to superimpose with the image of her late father.

Sofie had trouble suppressing her quickened heartbeat—



Afterword

Sumimori Sai here. Some of you might also know me as Sumimorisai. Nice to meet you.

This work was serialized on the web novel site *Shousetsuka ni Narou*.

Although the protagonist is a rough and tough middle-aged man with a scary face, this is not a story where he proves himself peerless by physically punching everything.

What this story is, however, is a story of how he got teleported into another world along with his entire house. For the sake of securing his family's livelihood, he uses the knowledge that he had accumulated while living in modern Japan in order to push a tiny, insignificant guild into becoming the biggest in the city. Please enjoy the feeling of exhilaration from him overcoming obstacles through negotiation.

Though granted, there is slapping of a dragon involved.

Next is a few words of thanks.

Ichijirushi-san, who so kindly took care of all the illustrations. Thank you so very much for so happily drawing the dandy-looking protagonist and the beautiful ladies, as well as the oh-so-adorable daughters.

Everyone over at the editorial department at K-BOOKS, and especially my editor, Kurita-san. I will continue to be in your care from now on! And last but not least, allow me to express my heartfelt thanks to you, my dear readers.

No matter if you started reading on the web or not, the very fact that you enjoy my work is what means the most to me.





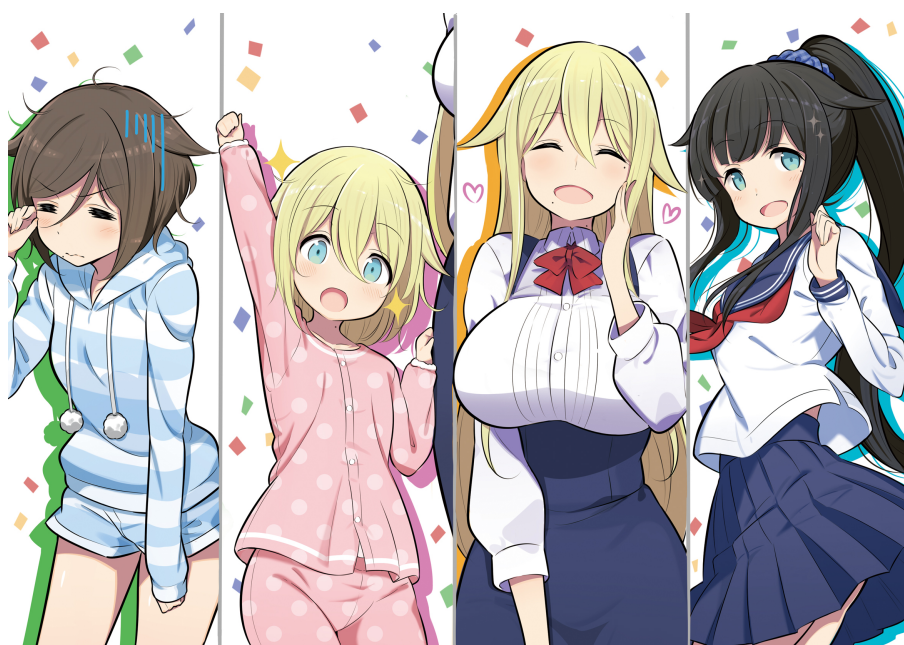




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Middle-Aged Businessman, Arise in Another World! Volume 1
by Sai Sumimori

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